

**March/April 2007 Volume 4, Issue 3**

**Editor's Note**

This fall I read Timothy Laniak's book *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, which provides an excellent biblical theology of the shepherding metaphor throughout Scripture (my review of the book below). While reading, I kept thinking that he needed to turn it into a study guide for elders. I even thought about emailing Professor Laniak—whom I don't know—with my stellar suggestion.

Paul Alexander made this email unnecessary. Gladly stealing the fruit of Laniak's careful study, Pastor Alexander translated Laniak's book into four separate lessons for the elders of his own church, which we reproduce here for you. Alexander's lessons were not written with a web audience in mind. They are long and full of Scripture. Pastor, let me

recommend printing them out, and reading them meditatively. Then send them to your fellow elders. They describe the heart of what God has called all of you to be.

As long as we're talking about training elders, take a look at what First Presbyterian in Jackson does, as well as what Bill Mounce has to offer.

Matt Schmucker and the other elders at Capitol Hill Baptist offer several reflections on living and surviving as an elder amidst the many difficulties of the work. Finally, Thabiti Anyabwile's article on following leaders, I believe, is worth cutting and pasting into one of your church newsletters. It will serve you, the congregation, and the glory of God. You'll see what I mean.

—Jonathan Leeman

**ELDER TRAINING**



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Trace the shepherd theme throughout the Scriptures, and consider what it means for elders today. Here are four classes one pastor presented to his elders.

By Paul Alexander



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Here's how one healthy church trains incoming elders and deacons.

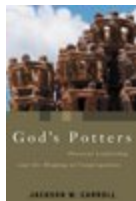
*The First Presbyterian Jackson Officer's Training Manual*



**Seminary Smarties—Now Showing At A Website Near You** Page 47

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By Bill Mounce

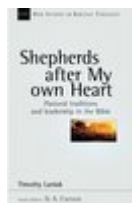


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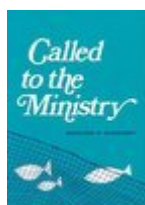


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## LIVING WITH ELDERS



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**"Thinking back to when you first became an elder, what initial lesson(s) most stand out in equipping you to elder well?"**





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## **AUDIO—LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS**

### **Particular Redemption, The New Perspective, and More with John Piper (and Bruce Ware!)**

*Post Date: 3/1/2007* (<http://resources.christianity.com/default/mrki.aspx>)

John Piper offers his thoughts on the New Perspective and other prominent topics today. He also briefly interacts with Bruce Ware on the extent of the atonement."

### **Biblical Counseling with Ed Welch**

*Post Date: 11/1/2006* (<http://resources.christianity.com/default/mrki.aspx>)

Meet Ed Welch, a biblical counselor at CCEF and author of the books *Depression and When People are Big and God is Small*. Mark Dever asks Ed about his background and testimony, as well the topics of co-dependency, substance abuse groups like A.A., medicating depression, "integrationism," "nouthetic" counseling, the role of counseling in the local church, and much more.

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## Lessons in Shepherding 1: God, Moses and David

By Paul Alexander

[*Editor's note:* In the interest of providing pastors with good resources, or at least of pointing them toward good ideas, we are grateful to present Pastor Paul Alexander's elder training seminars for new elders. Alexander himself says that this study is dependent on and adapted from Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart* (IVP, 2006), and A.D. Clarke, "Leadership," in the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (IVP, 2000). This issue of the *9News* presents the first half of Alexander's curriculum (classes 1 to 4), which exclusively focuses on the metaphor of shepherding in Scripture. In a future issue, we hope to present the latter half of his curriculum, which moves to the more practical aspects of eldering.]

Jeremiah 3:15 "Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding" (NAS used throughout).

### GOD – THE ULTIMATE SHEPHERD

The whole history of God's people can be traced using the metaphor of God as the shepherd of his people. From Jacob in Genesis, to the exodus from Egypt, and all the way to the second exodus from the wilderness of this world, God reveals himself as the shepherd of his people.

#### For Jacob

To begin with, God reveals himself as the shepherd of particular individuals, and individuals who were representative of the whole nation of Israel, such as Jacob.

And [Jacob/Israel] blessed Joseph, and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and may my name live on in them, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth" (Gen 48:15).

What did Jacob mean when he said that God had been his shepherd all the days of his life? It's helpful to go back to God's promise to Jacob in Genesis 28, where he promises to give Jacob the Promised Land and many descendants, and then says to him, "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you" (Gen 28:15).

God's *presence* and God's *protection* were the ways in which God shepherded Jacob all his life. So even before Israel became a nation—when Israel was just Jacob the individual—God was the shepherd of his people, providing his sovereign presence and omnipotent protection to ensure the fulfillment of his original promises to Abraham of a people and a place.

#### For David

God also shepherded David, another representative Israelite. As we read in Psalm 23,

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever (Ps. 23).

What are some of the functions of a shepherd that David ascribes to God in this chapter?

- In verses 1-2, God provides *nourishment* (green grass, quiet waters), *rest* (lie down), *restoration* of the soul, and *satisfaction* (I shall not want).
- In verse 3, he provides *guidance* (in paths of righteousness).
- In verse 4, he provides *protection* and *comfort*, by virtue of his presence and his rod and staff (the instruments a shepherd used to gather the sheep and fend off wild animals).

#### Through The Exodus

Just as God shepherded Jacob and David, two representative individuals of Israel, so God shepherded the entire nation of Israel through the exodus. For instance, the Psalmist describes God's care for corporate, national Israel in the wilderness of Sinai as shepherding care:

You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron (Ps. 77:20).

He leveled a path for his anger; He did not spare their soul from death, but gave over their life to the plague, and smote all the firstborn in Egypt, the first issue of their virility in the tents of Ham. But He led forth his own people like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock; He led them safely, so that they did not fear; but the sea engulfed their enemies. So He brought them to his holy land, to this hill country which his right hand had gained" (Ps 78:50-54; see also Ps. 80:1).

What aspects of shepherding do we see in these verses?

- *Leadership* through the wilderness,
- *protection* and *safety* in the desert,
- *settling the fears* of the sheep,
- *fending off enemies* of the sheep with power and courage.

It's important to see here that Israel's whole history is described as one seamless pastoral journey. From the days of Jacob, through the exodus from Egypt, through the wilderness of Sinai, to the people's possession of the Promised Land, God's relates to his people as a shepherd to his sheep.

### ***Through The Exile***

Looking forward to the nation's exile, Isaiah saw another exodus coming, an exodus out of slavery to sin and into the holiness of the new creation:

Behold, the Lord God will come with might, with his arm ruling for Him. Behold, his reward is with him and his recompense before Him. Like a shepherd He will tend his flock, in his arm He will gather the lambs and carry them in his bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes" (Is. 40:10-11).

Chapter 40 of Isaiah, from which these verses come, marks the beginning of a new section in Isaiah in which God promises that he will lead his people through a new exodus. Several chapters later, Isaiah says, "Behold, I will do something new, now it will spring forth; will you not be aware of it? I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, rivers in the desert" (Is. 43:18-19). In one sense, this is exactly what God had done in the wilderness of Sinai—lead the people through a wasteland with no road, and provide water in the desert. Yet now he promises to do it in a new way. It won't be a physical or geographical exodus, but a spiritual exodus out of slavery to sin, through the wilderness of this world, and into the new creation (see Is. 40:1-2). Still, God uses the same language to describe how he will lead his people in this second exodus—"like a shepherd."

Jeremiah sees the same thing: "Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare in the coastlands afar off, and say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him and keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock'" (Jer 31:10). In exile, the shepherd's *gathering* role comes to the foreground. God will gather his scattered sheep back together in one place.

Micah sees God gathering his sheep from exile as well: "I will surely assemble all of you, Jacob, I will surely gather the remnant of Israel. I will put them together like sheep in the fold; like a flock in the midst of its pasture they will be noisy with men" (Micah 2:12).

Micah later prays, "Shepherd your people with Your scepter, the flock of Your possession which dwells by itself in the woodland, in the midst of a fruitful field. Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old. As in the days when you came out from the land of Egypt, I will show you miracles" (Micah 7:14). Notice that God speaks of *protecting* his sheep, which is what a scepter was for. He also speaks of *feeding* them. And Micah connects this shepherding idea with the new exodus out of exile for sins. It's going to be like the days when Israel came out of Egypt.

### ***Summary***

So God is the shepherd of his people. First, he leads them through the dry wilderness of Sinai to the Promised Land, and then he leads us through the parched wilderness of a sinful world on our way to heaven.

What aspects of God's shepherding care for Israel have we seen so far?

- *Protecting* the sheep,
- *providing for* the sheep,

- *being present with* his sheep,
- *gathering* the sheep together,
- and *guiding* the sheep.

These are the activities that God thinks about and performs when he uses the metaphor of shepherding for leading his people.

As under-shepherds, then, we who are elders are called to shepherd God's people in the same way:

- under his authority,
- through a wilderness world that is not our home,
- toward the Promised Land of heaven, where our true citizenship lies.

We lead them there

- by knowing the way ourselves,
- by keeping them together along the way,
- by feeding them on God's Word,
- and by being present with them.

## **MOSES – THE FIRST EXEMPLARY SHEPHERD**

Let's turn then to those whom God appoints as shepherds over his people, and begin with Moses.

Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush (Ex. 3:1-2a).

Interestingly, Moses was actually a shepherd when God called him to lead Israel out of Egypt. And upon God's call he remained a shepherd, but now of a much larger flock: "You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (Ps 77:20). God did the leading, but he led *by* the hand of Moses and Aaron. Moses' leadership was an extension of God's leadership. As Tim Laniak puts it, "Moses is the extension of God's rule in their lives, the means of their provision, and the agent of their deliverance....[his hand] became an extension of the 'hand of God' leading his people." [1]

Hosea 12:13 makes the same point: "By a prophet the Lord brought Israel from Egypt, and by a prophet he was kept [or 'cared for']" Moses threw the branch in the bitter waters of Marah, but it was God who made the desert waters drinkable for his flock (Ex. 15). Moses struck the rock at Massah with his staff, but it was God who caused the water to gush forth for his sheep to drink (Ex. 17).

### ***Moses as Prophet***

As the shepherd of God's people, Moses was also a prophet: "The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex 33:11). He was the one who went up to Mount Sinai on behalf of the people to receive the law. And when God spoke in their hearing at Sinai, the people said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die" (Ex. 20:19).

As the paradigm shepherd and prophet of Israel, Moses was the voice of God to the people. They were to follow his voice.

### ***Moses as Priest***

Moses was also the voice of the people to God. He interceded with God on their behalf. Notice the change in Moses' willingness to identify himself with the people of Israel that occurs in his prayers between chapters 17 and 34 of Exodus.

So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, 'What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me" (Ex 17:4).

Then Moses returned to the Lord, and said, 'Alas, this people has committed a great sin and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if You will, forgive their sin – and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written! (Ex 32:31).

If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession (Ex. 34:9).

Moses moves from “this people” and “their sin” to “us” and “our sin.”[2] Such identification was primarily a function of Moses’ priestly role, but it was not unrelated to his shepherding role. God wants his under-shepherds to identify with the plight of his sheep, which is exactly what we see the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, doing at his incarnation and all through his earthly ministry.

When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things” (Mark 6:34).

Where is Jesus getting that reference to “sheep without a shepherd”?

### ***Moses as Leader***

Jesus’ allusion in Mark 6 to “sheep without a shepherd” comes from the book of Numbers.

Then Moses spoke to the LORD, saying, “May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the LORD will not be like sheep which have no shepherd.” So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; and have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and commission him in their sight. You shall put some of your authority on him, in order that all the congregation of the sons of Israel may obey him (Num 27:15-20).

What’s the one character trait that God told Moses to look for in Joshua? The Spirit was in him.

What particular aspect of shepherding is noted here? Leadership – leading them out and bringing them in.

Why would Joshua need the Spirit to do that kind of work? Because leading God’s people in and out was really an exercise in helping them to follow God as the ultimate Shepherd of Israel. As Laniak sums it up, “Human leader[ship] of God’s people is nothing other than God leading his own people through an anointed servant.” That doesn’t make the human leader infallible or unable to be corrected. But it does make him the human instrument by which God shepherds his flock.

### **DAVID – THE SECOND EXEMPLARY SHEPHERD**

David is introduced to readers as an actual shepherd twice in 1 Samuel’s narrative.

“Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Are these all the children?’ And he said, ‘There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep” (1 Sam. 16:11).

David was the youngest. Now the three oldest followed Saul, but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father’s flock at Bethlehem” (1 Sam. 17:14-15).

### ***David, Saul, and Goliath***

It’s also worth observing, David’s own introduction to King Saul:

When the words which David spoke were heard, they told them to Saul, and he sent for him. David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Then Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth while he has been a warrior from his youth." But David said to Saul, "Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God." And David said, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and may the LORD be with you" (1 Sam. 17:31-37).

What aspects of shepherding are prominent here?

- *Protection,*
- *the courage of faith,*
- *seeking out the lost (v.34-35).*

Yet to whom does David give credit for these things? The Lord. The Lord was the one who delivered him from the lion and the bear. His confidence to defeat Goliath is not rooted in himself. It’s rooted in the greatness of God.

Why is David so confident that God will enable him to defeat Goliath? Because he knows that God is committed to his own glory among his people, and Goliath is working against God's glory by making fun of his people.

The man who is a shepherd of God's people must know that he is a guardian of God's fame, a fact in which he should find tremendous confidence. If God is wholly committed to the honor of his own name, then to stand up for God's fame, even if it means committing professional suicide (or worse), is to stand in the safest place in the universe.

### **David as Ruler**

The kings of Israel were nothing like the pagan pharaohs of Egypt, kings of Babylon, or caesars of Rome, absolute in their power and beholden to no one. Rather, David and his sons were to be from among the people, and their rule was a stewardship.

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Behold, we are your bone and your flesh. Previously, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and in. And the Lord said to you, 'You will shepherd My people Israel, and you will be a ruler over Israel (2 Sam. 5:1-2; cf. Deut. 17:15).

The word for ruler here is *nagid*, referring not to an autonomous king but a crowned prince whose authority was derived, not inherent. The idea of being a *nagid* is placed in parallel position here with shepherding God's people. So Israel gets a king, but, as Laniak writes, "only on the condition that it understands his role as derivative from and dependent on the rule of Jehovah, the flock's true owner. Kings, beginning with Saul, were to be measured in terms of their responsiveness to the words of that Owner, mediated through the prophets."<sup>[3]</sup>

When David made Jerusalem the new capital, he tried to transport the Ark of the Covenant there on an ox cart (see 2 Sam. 6), contrary to God's command to carry it by poles. So God allowed David to encounter a little resistance. The ox cart began to tip over, David's helper Uzzah reached out to steady the ark, and God killed him on the spot. It seemed to be God's way of saying, "We'll do this my way, David. I'm the *melek* (king); you're the *nagid* (prince)."

In the next chapter, David expresses his desire to build God a house. Yet God turns it around on him and tells him he's going to build David a house. The reason God objects to David's idea is instructive:

Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?" (2 Samuel 7:7).

God objected to the house of cedar because he had never asked his people to make him a house of cedar. God will be the one who initiates. He will be the one who controls and determines the rules of engagement. "God will bless David, but on God's terms."<sup>[4]</sup>

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

The issue at stake here lies with who has the ultimate authority. And God always makes sure that his under-shepherds know how to answer that question rightly. God has the ultimate authority, and whenever that authority is challenged, he will squash the challenger. He will not share his glory with another. God takes the initiative in calling his shepherds, and God holds his shepherds accountable by blessing and disciplining them according to his Word.

God's shepherds are called to exercise God's work of gathering, guarding, nourishing, uniting, and guiding God's flock through the God-opposing wilderness of this world *on behalf of God*. They do this by keeping the flock centered upon God and his Word. God is the king, the owner of the sheep. We who are elders are adopted princes, under-shepherds with no authority of our own. If we ever begin to shepherd God's flock contrary to his Word or in a way that ignores our accountability to him and his ultimate authority over us, we will be the losers.

The whole story of Israel's history in Psalm 78 ends with a reference to David's shepherd leadership.

He also chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him to shepherd Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skillful hands (Ps 78:70-72).

May the Lord grant us skillful hands.

Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, in *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, ed. D. A. Carson (IVP, 2006), 87.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 89-90.



<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

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## Lessons in Shepherding 2: Jeremiah and Ezekiel

By Paul Alexander

[*Editor's note:* In the interest of providing pastors with good resources, or at least of pointing them toward good ideas, we are grateful to present Pastor Paul Alexander's elder training seminars for new elders. Alexander himself says that this study is dependent on and adapted from Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart* (IVP, 2006), and A.D. Clarke, "Leadership," in the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (IVP, 2000). This issue of the 9Marks eJournal presents the first half of Alexander's curriculum (classes 1 to 4), which exclusively focuses on the metaphor of shepherding in Scripture. In a future issue, we hope to present the latter half of his curriculum, which moves to the more practical aspects of eldering.]

We're studying the leadership metaphor of "shepherding" in the Old Testament, in part because Paul counsels the Ephesian elders to "shepherd the church of God which he purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28, *NAS used throughout*). Peter likewise counsels elders to "shepherd the flock of God among you" (1 Pet. 5:2).

In the former class on biblical shepherding, we studied the model shepherds of the Old Testament. God is the ultimate shepherd of his people, as we discovered in texts like Psalm 23 and Isaiah 40:11. Moses was the first paradigmatic human shepherd, through whom God shepherded his people. And David is said to be a shepherd as well.

In this class, we're going to look at a few critiques of bad shepherds from Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

### JEREMIAH

#### *The Setting—Chapter 2*

Let's start in Jeremiah by reading a few passages that describe the situation of Israel in Jeremiah's day and which use the shepherd metaphor.

Thus says the LORD, "What injustice did your fathers find in Me, that they went far from Me and walked after emptiness and became empty? They did not say, 'Where is the LORD who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought and of deep darkness, through a land that no one crossed and where no man dwelt?' I brought you into the fruitful land to eat its fruit and its good things. But you came and defiled My land, and My inheritance you made an abomination. The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' And those who handle the law did not know Me; the rulers [*roheem*, shepherds] also transgressed against Me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after things that did not profit. Therefore I will yet contend with you," declares the LORD, "And with your sons' sons I will contend" (Jer 2:5-9).

Why did the nation of Israel wander away from God and forget his great works of redemption in the past? Because their priests, rulers, and prophets had been negligent. The word for "rulers" here is "shepherds" and refers to the kings. The shepherds were partly to blame for the apostasy of the people and for the defilement of the land by their transgression of the law. Deuteronomy 17:18-20 had stipulated that the king must write out for himself a copy of the law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests, and that he should read it all the days of his life. He was to do this in order to learn how to fear the Lord and obey his statutes, and "so that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel" (Deut. 17:19b-20). Through writing out God's law, the king was supposed to learn humility, because the moment in which he became prideful, he would in the same moment disregard God's authority over him and act as if his royal authority was inherent in himself rather than derived from God.

The application for us today is pretty clear: there's a direct relationship between our humility and how much we tie ourselves to God's Word in fulfilling our roles as elders. Our authority is wholly tied to what can be taught from God's Word, and not one inch beyond it.

#### *A Promise—Chapter 3*

Unfortunately, this is exactly what was happening in the days of Jeremiah. The shepherd-kings were transgressing God's law and overstepping the bounds of their own authority. In response, God promised to give his people new shepherds:

"Return, O faithless sons," declares the LORD; "For I am a master to you, and I will take you one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding" (Jer 3:14-15).

What's true of these new shepherds?

- They are gifts from God.
- They share God's heartfelt concern for his sheep.
- And this heartfelt concern works itself out in a carefulness to feed his sheep on the knowledge and understanding of God and his law rather than their own knowledge, or the knowledge of the pagan gods and practices of their Canaanite neighbors. Knowledge and understanding of God, his Word, and his ways are nourishing and sustaining for the sheep.

### **Stupid Shepherds—Chapter 10**

Shepherds who do not rely on God's Word, on the other hand, are just plain stupid.

For the shepherds have become stupid and have not sought the LORD; therefore they have not prospered, and all their flock is scattered (Jer 10:21).

In the verses of chapter 10 leading up to this condemnation, Jeremiah contrasts the impotence of idols and the stupidity of their worshippers with the living creator God. The wise men of the pagan nations are stupid and foolish (Jer. 10:8) and "every man is stupid, devoid of knowledge; every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols" (Jer. 10:14). Then in verse 21, he says the shepherds of Israel are just as stupid as the pagan "wise men" because they have ignored the Word of the living God and begun to worship idols. They've become just like what they've worshipped. Instead of beholding God and become godly, they've looked at the pagan idols of the culture around them and become stupid.

It's worth pausing long enough to consider, what would such mimicking of culture look like today, especially among those who call themselves evangelical pastors?

### **Bad, Good, and Very Good—23:1-8**

In the first verses of Jeremiah 23, God promises woe upon these unfaithful shepherds, and then promises to gather his flock himself with good shepherds and a Good Shepherd:

"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!" declares the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: "You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them; behold, I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds," declares the LORD. "Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply. I will also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD. "Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and he will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; and this is his name by which he will be called, 'The LORD our righteousness.' Therefore behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when they will no longer say, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up and led back the descendants of the household of Israel from the north land and from all the countries where I had driven them.' Then they will live on their own soil" (Jer. 23:1-8).

What are these bad shepherds doing that makes them bad shepherds? They destroy the sheep (v. 1), scatter them (vv. 1, 2), let sheep go missing, expose them to danger, and generally neglect them (v.2—"have not attended to them").

Why is neglecting and exposing sheep to danger so bad? Because sheep are dumb and careless. They need guidance.

How does God characterize this kind of neglect? It's evil (v.2).

What is God going to do to address the situation? He's going to bring the sheep back to their pasture and raise up better shepherds to tend them.

What will these better shepherds do for the sheep?

- They will *nourish* rather than destroy them, so that they can be fruitful and multiply.
- They will *gather* them together rather than scattering them.
- They will *keep track* and *account* for each one of them ("nor will any be missing").
- God will *keep them secure* in the flock rather than exposing them to danger (v.4 "they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified"; v. 6 "will dwell securely").

These are categories for us to associate with the work of shepherding the flock – nourishing them so that they can be spiritually fruitful and multiply themselves; gathering them together into a flock; keeping track of each one of them so that none go missing; keeping them within the security of the flock with no reason for fear from wolves who would promote false teaching.

Yet what is God's ultimate solution for his people according to verse 5? God will raise up a righteous Branch from the house of David to reign as king, act wisely, and do righteousness. The righteous obedience and saving activity of this king is what will save the Lord's people from their sins and make them dwell securely with him as they follow his voice back to their own pasture lands.

So God will raise up multiple human shepherds to lead and feed his people. But ultimately it will be this righteous Branch of David who reigns over both the sheep and over the under-shepherds in order to establish his people in righteousness, salvation, and security. This Branch of David, of course, is Jesus Christ, the ultimate Good Shepherd in John 10, who we will look at in the next class.

### ***Jeremiah's Lamentation—23:9-15***

In the verses that follow, we hear Jeremiah's reaction to his nation's leaders. Jeremiah writes,

As for the prophets: my heart is broken within me, all my bones tremble; I have become like a drunken man, even like a man overcome with wine, because of the LORD and because of His holy words. For the land is full of adulterers; for the land mourns because of the curse. The pastures of the wilderness have dried up. Their course also is evil and their might is not right. "For both prophet and priest are polluted; even in My house I have found their wickedness," declares the LORD. "Therefore their way will be like slippery paths to them, they will be driven away into the gloom and fall down in it; for I will bring calamity upon them, the year of their punishment," declares the LORD. "Moreover, among the prophets of Samaria I saw an offensive thing: They prophesied by Baal and led My people Israel astray. Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: the committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; and they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one has turned back from his wickedness. All of them have become to Me like Sodom, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah." Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets, "Behold, I am going to feed them wormwood and make them drink poisonous water, for from the prophets of Jerusalem pollution has gone forth into all the land" (Jer 23:9-15).

What is Jeremiah *doing* in verses 9 and 10? He's lamenting the state of the people and the land.

Why? Because God has brought the covenant curse of famine as a result of the prophets' disobedience ("For the land mourns because of the curse. The pastures of the wilderness have dried up."). The famine here may be literal, but it may also be spiritual – it's a famine of the Word of the Lord among the prophets and priests. God says the prophets and priests are both polluted (v.11), and he promises to judge them (v.12). In verse 13, God brings back shepherding imagery with the idea of leading God's people astray.

How are the Samarian prophets leading God's people astray in verse 13? By prophesying according to Baal.

How are the Jerusalem prophets leading them astray in verse 14? By walking in immorality (adultery) and falsehood (heterodoxy), and by not calling the people to repentance ("so that no one has turned back from his wickedness"). Calling people to repent of wickedness is part of biblical, spiritual shepherding.

So how does God judge these prophets in verse 15? Since the prophets and priests are polluted in verse 11 by immorality and heterodoxy, God will pollute them by feeding them on the wormwood and poisonous water of his judgment. This is an example of *lex talionis*, the law of retribution in which the punishment fits the crime.

### ***"My Words to My People"—23:16-22***

What's ultimately the problem with these false prophets? They do not stand with God, which is evidenced by the fact that they do not speak his Word. Instead they speak according to their own imaginings.

Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; They speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the LORD. "They keep saying to those who despise Me, 'The LORD has said, "You will have peace "'; and as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, they say, 'Calamity will not come upon you.' "But who has stood in the council of the LORD, that he should see and hear His word? Who has given heed to His word and listened? "Behold, the storm of the LORD has gone forth in wrath, even a whirling tempest; it will swirl down on the head of the wicked. "The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has performed and carried out the purposes of His heart; in the last days you will clearly understand it. "I did not send *these* prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied. "But if they had stood in my council, then they

would have announced My words to My people, And would have turned them back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds (Jer. 23:16-22).

How might we sum up the problem expressed in these verses? The prophets are speaking out of their own imaginations rather than out of God's Word. They speak without first being spoken to and listening (v. 18 "But who has stood in the council of the Lord, that he should see and hear his word? Who has given heed to his word and listened?"; v.21 "I did not send these prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied.")

What would the prophets have said to God's people if they had listened to God before speaking to them? They would have announced God's words to God's people (v.22). And they would have called them to turn back "from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds." In other words, they would have called the people to repentance.

What a dire warning this presents to evangelical elders today! Commenting on an earlier chapter of Jeremiah, Tenth Presbyterian pastor Philip Ryken meditates on what will be the outcome of church members whose pastors preach "Peace, peace" where there is no peace. Ryken writes,

"It is easy to imagine that many people will say the same thing on the day of judgment, when Jesus Christ will judge every man, woman, and child according to his or her deeds. 'We hoped for peace,' some will say. 'My pastor told me there wouldn't be any Hell.' Or 'My spiritual advisor said God would accept me as long as I did my best.'"<sup>a</sup>

Elders, do you want to put the members of your church in this position?

### **Lost Sheep—50:6-7**

When God's shepherds forsake, or overlook, or simply take for granted, God's Word, God's people will be led astray. As the Lord himself says through Jeremiah,

My people have become lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray. They have made them turn aside on the mountains; they have gone along from mountain to hill and have forgotten their resting place. All who came upon them have devoured them; and their adversaries have said, "We are not guilty, inasmuch as they have sinned against the LORD who is the habitation of righteousness, even the LORD, the hope of their fathers" (Jer 50:6-7).

What failures does God highlight among his shepherds in these verses? First, the shepherds have led the sheep astray. They have turned aside from the path, away from the green pastures, and along the dangerous cliffs of the mountains and from the mountains to the hills. The hills in Jeremiah are associated with the worship of Baal, the storm God (see 2:20—committing adultery on every high hill; also, 3:2—harlotry on the barren heights). The shepherds are probably not just the kings, but the priests as well, and likely the prophets too. All of them are leading the people into idolatry and away from the true worship of the true God.

Second, they've caused the sheep to forget their resting place.

Third, they've failed to protect them from the wild animals that would devour them.

What effect does this have on outsiders, that is, those who are not God's people? The outsiders begin to assume that they are not guilty of attacking the people of God, since the people of God are clearly compromised ("We are not guilty, inasmuch as they have sinned.")!

As we saw in our prior study, being a responsible shepherd means knowing where you are going with the sheep, knowing how to get there, doing your best to ensure that all the sheep actually get there, and making sure that your destination is a safe place where the sheep would have plenty of food and water and be protected by wild animals. Bad shepherds neglect all these responsibilities. They are more impressed with their own wisdom than with God's. They are more ambitious for their own fame than God's.

As shepherds of God's flock, we are responsible to God the Father, under Jesus Christ, by the power of his Spirit, to lead the congregation into the green pastures of God's Word and true worship of him. We are responsible to protect them from those who would teach false doctrine (or no doctrine) to them. And we are responsible to lead them to enter into the rest of God by ensuring their salvation through the right teaching and application of the Scriptures according to 1 Timothy 4:12-16.

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<sup>a</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope*, from *Preaching the Word* series, ed. R. Kent Hughes (Crossway, 2001), 158.

### ***Hope in God as the true Shepherd—50:17-20***

"Israel is a scattered flock, the lions have driven them away. The first one who devoured him was the king of Assyria, and this last one who has broken his bones is Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. "Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Behold, I am going to punish the king of Babylon and his land, just as I punished the king of Assyria. 'And I will bring Israel back to his pasture and he will graze on Carmel and Bashan, and his desire will be satisfied in the hill country of Ephraim and Gilead. 'In those days and at that time,' declares the LORD, 'search will be made for the iniquity of Israel, but there will be none; and for the sins of Judah, but they will not be found; for I will pardon those whom I leave as a remnant.'

Who are the lions here? The kings of Assyria and Babylon. And again, Israel is scattered, which is a bad thing. God wants his sheep together.

What is God going to do for Israel in verse 19? He's going to bring Israel back to his pasture.

Why? So he can graze and be satisfied. So the goal of God for his sheep—the reason he's bringing them back to their own pasture—is to let them graze and be satisfied with eating from the good grass. He will pardon their iniquity, and grant them their desires for knowing and truly worshipping him. May our work contribute to, and not hinder, God's re-gathering.

### **EZEKIEL**

Perhaps more than any prophet in the Old Testament, the prophet Ezekiel is known for his incisive condemnation of the shepherds of Israel.

#### ***Leading the Sheep to Sin—Ezekiel 22***

In chapter 22, he points to how the shepherd's negligence results in bad behavior among the sheep.

There is a conspiracy of her prophets in her midst like a roaring lion tearing the prey. They have devoured lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in the midst of her. "Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the profane, and they have not taught the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they hide their eyes from My sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. Her princes within her are like wolves tearing the prey, by shedding blood and destroying lives in order to get dishonest gain. Her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' when the LORD has not spoken. The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery, and they have wronged the poor and needy and have oppressed the sojourner without justice. I searched for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one. Thus I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; their way I have brought upon their heads," declares the Lord GOD (Ezek 22:25-30).

What particular failures of the prophets and priests are highlighted here? Instead of protecting the sheep, the prophets are preying on them. They're enriching themselves, and they're failing to teach God's holiness and model that holiness in their own lives. The princes are also acting like wolves instead of shepherds in order to enrich themselves with money that doesn't rightly belong to them. They are speaking from their own imagination instead of waiting for God to speak and saying what he says.

What results from these failures (in verses 29 and 30)? Sinfulness among the people. And it's a particular kind of sinfulness: the sheep are sinning against each other, oppressing each other, robbing each other, wronging the poor. Bad shepherding—failure to protect the sheep, failure to teach them about God's holiness, failure to model that holiness in our own lives—corrupts the behavior of the flock. As the shepherds go, so go the sheep.

#### ***Prophecy Against the Shepherds—34:1-10***

Ezekiel 34 presents what may be the most famous denunciation of bad shepherds in the Bible.

Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? "You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat *sheep* without feeding the flock. "Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. <sup>5</sup> "They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. <sup>6</sup> "My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was

scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek *for them*." 7 Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 8 "As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "surely because My flock has become a prey, My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd, and My shepherds did not search for My flock, but *rather* the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock; 9 therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 10 "Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them"" (Ezek. 34:1-10).

What are the shepherds doing wrong here? First, they are failing to feed the sheep and feeding themselves instead. They are acting as if they own the sheep, able to treat them as they please, rather than as God has instructed them to treat the sheep—like owners, not stewards.

Second, they're not binding up the broken or healing the diseased.

Third, they're not gathering or bringing back the sheep that have been scattered. According to verse 5, this scattering happened because there was no shepherd.

Fourth, they ruled the sheep harshly (v.4 "with force and with severity you have dominated them").

Fifth, because they were scattered, the sheep were exposed to the danger of wild animals who would devour them. In verse 6, we're given an extended description of this scattering: "My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them." God laments the situation in which his sheep are scattered and wandering off alone.

How does God then react to such negligence? He says that he's against those shepherds, and he demands his sheep from them. He calls those shepherds to account. He sets himself in opposition to them. He's not going to allow his sheep to endure that kind of treatment from negligent and domineering under-shepherds.

### ***A Great Salvation—34:11-17***

In the verses that follow this denunciation of the bad shepherds, God promises a great salvation for his sheep.

"As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord GOD. "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment. As for you, My flock," thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the rams and the male goats" (Ezek. 34:12-17).

What is God's solution to the failure of his under-shepherds? He is going to shepherd the flock *himself*. And notice how he will do this. In verse 11, he will search for the sheep when they are scattered. In verse 12, he delivers them from all the dangers of the places where they were scattered. In verse 13, he brings them back and gathers them together and brings them to their own land, and he does this in order to feed them.

### ***Feeding***

Notice the repetition and detailed description in these verses of the feeding idea: "I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest." This feeding and leading to rest is the goal of the searching and delivering and gathering. Everything leads up to the feeding and the rest.

Skipping down a few more verses, we read, "Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd" (Ezek. 34:23).

What's the principle activity of this one shepherd God places over the people? God will set his servant David over his people to feed them. Again, the feeding function stands by metonymy for everything a shepherd does. Feeding is the primary work of the

shepherd. The reason the shepherd guides and guards the sheep, the reason he searches for the strays and binds up the wounded, is so that they can get to the green pastures and feed.

## CONCLUSION

The composite sketch of shepherding we get from Jeremiah and Ezekiel is one of recognizing that the sheep are God's and not ours, which keeps us from using the flock for our own ends.

- This involves gathering the scattered sheep, binding the broken and healing the sick, and keeping them together without any of them missing.
- This involves protecting the flock from wolves rather than preying on them, and leading them to the safety and satisfaction of their own pasture land.
- And all this is for the end of feeding them on the knowledge of God's character and word and ways. All this shepherding work can be referred to in shorthand with the language of feeding the sheep, or grazing them on good pasture lands.

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## Lessons in Shepherding 3: The Gospels

By Paul Alexander

[Editor's note: In the interest of providing pastors with good resources, or at least of pointing them toward good ideas, we are grateful to present Pastor Paul Alexander's elder training seminars for new elders. Alexander himself says that this study is dependent on and adapted from Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart* (IVP, 2006), and A.D. Clarke, "Leadership," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (IVP, 2000). This issue of the *9Marks eJournal* presents the first half of Alexander's curriculum (classes 1 to 4), which exclusively focuses on the metaphor of shepherding in Scripture. In a future issue, we hope to present the latter half of his curriculum, which moves to the more practical aspects of eldering.]

We've been looking at the shepherding metaphor in the Bible as it's used to explain leadership among God's people. We started by looking at the paradigm shepherds in the Bible: God, Moses, and David. Our second session focused on the prophetic critiques of Ezekiel and Jeremiah leveled against bad shepherds. In this session, we will move ahead to the New Testament and focus on the shepherding metaphor in the gospels.

### MARK

We begin in the Gospel of Mark. A couple of sessions ago, we read this verse: "When Jesus went ashore, he saw a large crowd, and he felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:34, *NAS used throughout*). We learned that that phrase "sheep without a shepherd" occurs in Numbers 27:17, where Moses prays near the end of his ministry, "May the Lord, the God of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the Lord will not be like sheep which have no shepherd." God would answer Moses' prayer in the person of Joshua. Clearly, it's a phrase about leadership.<sup>b</sup>

In the context of Mark 6, what does Jesus feel toward the crowd? Compassion. That word for compassion in the Greek is *splag-knizomai*. It means "moved in the inward parts" or, literally, "moved in the bowels." There's a depth to his compassion. He loves them with a deep and inward concern.

Why does he feel compassion for them? Because they are like sheep without a shepherd. They have no leader, no master, no one to go before them.

How does he express compassion or concern? He teaches them many things. He doesn't become their political or military ruler. He doesn't grandstand or make himself look great, as the worldly leaders would do. He acts as their shepherd and leader first and foremost through teaching them. He goes on to meet their physical needs as well, but the first thing he does is teach them. He feeds their souls by feeding their minds, and only after that does he feed their bodies.

What does this mean for us as Christ-like shepherd-leaders? Shepherding has to do with teaching, as when God says through Jeremiah, "I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding" (3:15).

### MATTHEW

#### *Ruling*

Aside from the clear connections between David and Jesus presented in Matthew's chronology, Jesus is first introduced to readers of Matthew as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise of a coming shepherd through Herod's enquiry about the birthplace of the Messiah:

The [chief priests and scribes] said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'" (Matt 2:1-6).

Where does this quote come from in verse 6? It's from Micah 5:2-4, which reads,

<sup>b</sup> It also occurs in 1 Kings, where Micaiah prophesies to Ahab king of Israel about the results of Ahab's military defeat at the hands of a pagan king. "I saw Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep which have no shepherd. And the Lord said, 'these have no master. Let each of them return to his house in peace'" (1 Kings 22:17).

But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *too* little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity."...And he will arise and shepherd *his flock* in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will remain, because at that time he will be great to the ends of the earth.

To say that Jesus is the shepherd of his flock is to say that he's a ruler. Both Matthew and Micah use the shepherding image to communicate rule or authority. He has authority to lead the flock, because he's the one who is supposed to know where the green pastures are. And when the sheep are done feeding and are ready to come back home, he is supposed to know the way back from the wilderness to the sheep pen. He leads them out because he knows where the food is. He leads them in because he knows the way home.

Part of that ruling authority, then, is protective. He has the authority to fend off attackers, and he's not afraid to exercise that authority for the protection of the sheep. He also has the authority to protect the sheep from themselves. The Good Shepherd won't just sit and watch as a one sheep bullies another, or as one sheep wanders off from the safety of the flock and risks getting lost, or falling off a cliff, or getting eaten by a predator. The authority or rule of the shepherd is a *protecting, sustaining, nurturing* authority that makes courageous sacrifices for the peace and safety of the flock.

### **Ruling Gently**

The shepherd's authority is not to be exercised harshly or arrogantly, but with gentleness. Consider Jesus words in Matthew 11: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28). This verse doesn't present us with a shepherding metaphor, but Jesus does approach us, and we are pictured as animals.

What are we doing by taking Jesus' yoke on us? We're becoming disciples, who learn from him ("Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me"). The word here for "learn" is *manthano*, the verbal form of the Greek noun *mathatais*, or disciple. So when Jesus speaks of his relationship with us as the caretaker of a herd of animals, he links it to the idea of teaching. He comes to us as a teacher, a teacher with authority to teach.

But what attitude does Jesus take toward us? An attitude of gentleness and humility of heart. The word translated "humble of heart" is *tapeinos*, or lowly in spirit, meek. Jesus doesn't come to us with a high-and-mighty attitude. He doesn't lord it over us as a stern lecturer. He approaches us with the yoke of discipleship in a lowly spirit.

What does that mean for us as shepherds of God's flock—for church elders? Gentleness and authority go together in the Chief Shepherd; so we should hold them together in our leadership of the flock as well. Part of following the example of Jesus as the Chief Shepherd is learning how to mingle authority with gentleness and humility.

How do we kill pride? We should ask God to cultivate lowly spirits in us and to kill our pride. We should also serve just like Jesus served, even to the point of death (Phil. 2:7-8). Humble teaching and servanthood is the model of spiritual leadership that Jesus sets for his under-shepherds. That's our goal. We want to be—and known by the congregation as—men who are lowly in spirit and gentle at heart, who teach God's Word with a spiritual authority that comes from God, an authority that's not rooted in our personalities or techniques, but that's derived from speaking his Word faithfully. That's how we should express our love and compassion for the congregation – the same way Jesus expressed his. As Jesus' under-shepherds, we are called to lead the congregation to put on the yoke of discipleship to Jesus Christ to learn from him.

### **Commissioning Under-shepherds**

When we turn to Matthew 9, we find the parallel passage to Mark 6:34, but with a little more detail.

Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Seeing the people, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest" (Matt 9:35-38).

What is the attitude of the crowd here? Distressed (*skullō*—troubled, annoyed; skinned or flayed) and dispirited (*riptō*—thrown down, tossed around; same word used in Luke 4:35 for a demon throwing a boy to the ground). Jesus sees that they have no peace. They may be annoyed or even scared, and they seem to be treated carelessly. They lack anyone to care for them. As in Mark 6:34, they're like sheep without a shepherd. But here Jesus' reaction is different. What does he do here? He doesn't teach them himself. He commands the disciples to pray that workers would be sent into the harvest. Jesus delegates some of his

shepherding authority to his disciples. The workers will be the ones who will bring in the harvest. And this is confirmed in the very next chapter, where Jesus formally charges his disciples with doing the work of shepherding.

Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness" (Matt. 10:1)

This is what Jesus was doing in 9:35 – healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Jesus' work becomes their work – he welcomes them into his mission and gives them a task.

### ***Sharing in His Suffering***

But a few verses later he tells them,

I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves (Matt. 10:16).

What does that warning communicate about the nature of the disciples' work? It was dangerous, and it would involve suffering. Jesus intentionally sent them as sheep into the middle of a wolf pack. They would be betrayed, handed over to the authorities, interrogated, and scourged (vv.17-18). They should expect to be betrayed by their families, even to the point of execution (v.21) They should expect to be hated on account of Jesus' name (v.22). But all this would be for the progress of the gospel—"for My sake, as a testimony to [the governors and kings] and to the Gentiles" (Matt. 10:18).

The point is that the call to shepherding is a call to suffering. Being sent out as workers into the harvest—being sent by the Great Shepherd to do *his* work of gathering and caring for the sheep—is a call to suffer. The call to Christian discipleship, and the call to working as an under-shepherd of Jesus Christ, are both calls to self-sacrifice and to exposing yourself to all sorts of pain and loss in this world.

### ***Taking Responsibility For All***

In addition to facing the suffering of Christ, Jesus' under-shepherds shoulder the responsibility of taking responsibility for every sheep in the fold. Telling a parable about a lost sheep, Jesus says,

If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish (Matt 18:12-14).

This passage is an answer to the disciples' question in verse 1 of chapter 18 about who will be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus answers by reversing their idea of greatness. In verse 3, he says they will have to become like children, the most powerless people of all, in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. In verse 10, he tells them not to despise the children, and then he sums up the parable of the lost sheep by saying the Father doesn't want even one of his little ones to perish.

What do you think that says about Jesus' view of his role as the Shepherd of his people? He knows he is responsible for every one of them, individually. He's concerned about the weakest and smallest, not just the strongest and most productive. He seeks out the individual strays. So must the elders of Christ's churches.

### ***Exercising Judgment***

If you keep reading in your Bible beyond this parable, you find Jesus turning in the very next paragraph to the subject of church discipline. Corrective church discipline, interestingly, is one means of seeking a strayed sheep. When a church excludes a member for unrepentant sin, it makes the stray's status explicit, or clear, thus presenting the stray with an opportunity to be restored. At the very least it will protect the flock by exposing one who is actually a goat or a wolf in sheep's clothing.

This authority of the local church to judge those within the flock (see 1 Cor. 5:12) is a foretaste of God's judgment between the sheep and the goats on the last day. As Jesus proclaimed,

But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with Him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and he will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and he will put the sheep on his right, and the goats on the left (Matt 25:31-32).

God reserves for himself the prerogative of the ultimate separation between those who are in the flock and those who are not. But he gives the local church authority to exercise corrective discipline, and when it comes to putting someone out of the church, the

elders lead the whole church in taking that action together. That's why Paul exhorts the church in Corinth to "remove the wicked man from among you" (1 Cor. 5:12).

## LUKE

Our look at the Gospel of Luke will be very brief. In chapter 15, Luke presents the parallel account of the parable we saw in Matthew 18. It's worth meditating on one more time.

Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near him to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable, saying, "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? "When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:1-7).

Does this text describe our desire as elders to see God do a great work of conversion among us and our community? Are we praying as elders for a move of God's Spirit among us to do his gathering work of conversion through this church? What keeps us from praying this way?

## JOHN

### ***Guarding, Knowing, and Gathering***

John's Gospel presents us with some of the most extended and beautiful statements about Jesus as our Good Shepherd. As Jesus says in chapter 10,

I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (John 10:11-18).

Which aspects of the Good Shepherd's character and responsibility stand out here? First, in contrast to the hired hand, the good shepherd is concerned about the sheep. He's so concerned for them, in fact, that he's willing to lay down his life for the sheep. He's not afraid or reticent to sacrifice himself for the good of his sheep. He sacrifices himself particularly in the service of protecting the sheep from wolves. He lays his life on the line to protect the sheep. He sacrifices himself uniquely in giving his life as a ransom for theirs.

Second, he knows his sheep. He knows which sheep are his, he knows the condition of his flock, and his flock recognizes his voice and follows him with willing trust.

Third, he gathers his flock together and keeps them together. One flock with one shepherd. The ideal is that the flock remains together.

What does all this mean for us as Christ's under-shepherds? First, it means we are called to *guard* the flock. We need to be on the lookout for wolves and cultivate in our hearts a willingness to protect the flock from them, even to our own hurt. We need to pray that God would plant and grow in us a loving and protective concern for the condition of the sheep and for their safety from wolves who teach false doctrine and practice.

Second, as shepherds, we need to work hard at *knowing* the sheep and making sure that they know us. The good shepherd isn't aloof from his sheep. Being a good under-shepherd involves more than just attending regular elder meetings. It means moving among the congregation in a particular way. We should be engaged with people as much as God enables us to be. Some of us will be better at this than others, initiating with people for their spiritual good. It will look different from shepherd to shepherd. But we all need to work hard at getting to know the sheep.

Let me offer two further implications of this second task. Working hard to know which particular sheep God has entrusted to our care means taking local church membership seriously. We must therefore be careful about how we admit members into the flock,

and we must be careful about how we see members out of the flock. Also, knowing the flock means knowing both the condition of particular sheep and the condition of the flock as a whole. Don't rush out after church services, but linger and chat. Call people throughout the week. Offer hospitality as often as you can.

Third, Christ's under-shepherds must know how to *gather* the flock. We want to keep the flock together. It's dangerous for sheep to wander off on their own. It's always best for sheep to remain together. At least two implications follow. To begin with, we can keep the flock together by working our way back to a single Sunday morning service rather than dividing the congregation so that many of them never worship and feed with one another. Also, we want to promote the right kind of peace among the congregation in several ways: by quelling disputes among the sheep, by making sure that the stronger don't abuse the weaker, by making sure that our teaching and leadership promote the right kind of peaceful unity, and by making sure that the service of the deacons promotes the right kind of peaceful unity.

### ***Stewarding, Feeding, Self-Sacrificing***

John's most dramatic statement of Jesus' commissioning of his under-shepherds must be Jesus' call on Peter to feed his sheep. We read,

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" he said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." he said to him, "Tend My lambs." he said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" he said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." he said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." he said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep. "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." Now this he said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he said to him, "Follow Me!" Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on his bosom at the supper and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!" (John 21:15-22).

The governing verb for Jesus' command to tend or shepherd is the Greek word *boskō*, which more specifically means to feed.

Whose sheep does Jesus command Peter to feed? Jesus' sheep. Jesus will still own the sheep. Peter doesn't own them. He is simply commissioned to feed and care for them as an under-shepherd accountable to the Owner Shepherd.

What is the relationship between love for Christ and feeding his sheep? Feeding Jesus' sheep is the particular way that Jesus wanted Peter to love *him*. As a shepherd of God's people, Jesus wanted Peter to feed Jesus' sheep as the evidence and outworking of Peter's love for Jesus. That's how closely Jesus identifies with his people. He does a similar thing with Paul in Acts 9, when he tells Paul, then Saul, that in persecuting the church, he is persecuting Jesus himself: "Saul, why are you persecuting [not my people, but] Me?" And Saul said, 'who are you, Lord?' And Jesus said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting'" (Acts 9:4-5) Twice in these verses in Acts Jesus identifies himself with his sheep. The same identification occurs in John 21, yet here Jesus identifies with the opposite kind of treatment of the sheep. In Acts 9, Jesus views himself as persecuted when his people are persecuted; in John 21, he views himself as loved when his people are loved (see also Matt 25:35-40).

What does this mean for us as under-shepherds of Jesus Christ? First, we must remember that we are merely *stewards*. We are accountable to Jesus for how we shepherd and feed his sheep. He is the owner-shepherd, we are the under-shepherds (Heb 13:17). So we must work hard to give practical care and doctrinal instruction wherever it's needed, and doing everything God enables us to do to present every person complete in Christ (Col 1:29).

Second, Christ's charge to Peter reminds elders that we need to *feed* the sheep. That may look different for a preaching elder like me and a non-staff elder. For a non-staff elder, feeding the sheep may occur by initiating regular one-on-one discipling relationships over breakfast or coffee or lunch, or leading a Bible Study in your home, or teaching a Sunday School class, or inviting singles or young married couples into your home for dinner and spiritual conversation, or being a person who is known in the congregation as easily approachable for biblical counsel and prayer. Whatever it looks like in your life, Jesus' charge to Peter will be something that drives you. Your heart is anxious to feed others, whatever opportunities God might give.

Having said that, it should also involve occasionally preaching in front of the whole congregation, in one gathering of the church or another. A congregation can become unnecessarily narrow by only listening to one preacher, no matter who that is. I want our own congregation to be exposed to the teaching of other elders. It breaks up the monotony of hearing my voice in every single service, and it lets the flock see other men handling the Word faithfully. It gives them the benefit of learning from someone else's sanctified

thought and labor in the text. And it gives the elders an opportunity to sharpen and expand eldering skills. Part of elder training must be experience in formally feeding the sheep from the pulpit.

Third, Christ's charge to Peter reminds elders of the call to *personal sacrifice*. Jesus was not simply calling Peter to an easy life in the country. He was calling Peter to the cross. Pastoral ministry involves dying to ourselves and our flesh, our laziness, our pride, our sense of entitlement. It's a call to grow in our willingness to make personal sacrifices for the good of the sheep as an expression of our love and loyalty to the Owner-Shepherd.

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## Lessons in Shepherding 4: Acts, 1 Peter, and Revelation

By Paul Alexander

[Editor's note: In the interest of providing pastors with good resources, or at least of pointing them toward good ideas, we are grateful to present Pastor Paul Alexander's elder training seminars for new elders. Alexander himself says that this study is dependent on and adapted from Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart* (IVP, 2006), and A.D. Clarke, "Leadership," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (IVP, 2000). This issue of the *9Marks eJournal* presents the first half of Alexander's curriculum (classes 1 to 4), which exclusively focuses on the metaphor of shepherding in Scripture. In a future issue, we hope to present the latter half of his curriculum, which moves to the more practical aspects of eldering.]

Over the last three classes, we have seen that the shepherding metaphor can be used to tell the story of how God deals with his people in the Bible. The metaphor is used to describe God's work and the work of his Son in the Old and New Testaments. The metaphor is also used to describe the men he specifically delegates to represent him in his work, again, in both Testaments.

In this fourth and final class of tracing this theme through the Bible, we will focus on Acts, 1 Peter, and Revelation.

### ACTS

Addressing the elders of the church in Ephesus, the apostle Paul says,

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified (Acts 20:28-32, *NAS used throughout*).

In the paragraphs preceding these verses, Paul reminds the elders that he had served the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came on him because of the Jews (v.19). He hadn't shrunk from declaring to them anything that was profitable, teaching them publicly and from house to house, testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (vv.20-21). His whole purpose in life had become to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God (v.24). And then he assures them that, as he had gone about them preaching the kingdom, he had declared the whole counsel of God to them (vv.25-27). After speaking of his own ministry, Paul then switches gears to command the elders in Ephesus to be on guard for themselves and the flock.

What then is the connection between Paul's ministry and the ministry of the local church elders? In other words, how does this context of proclamation and testimony inform Paul's command to the elders to shepherd the flock of God? Paul was modeling in his own apostolic ministry how to be a shepherd of God's flock. Shepherding involves serving, humility, tears, trials, courage, declaring everything in Scripture, public teaching, house-to-house teaching, testifying to repentance and faith in Christ, preaching the kingdom, and declaring the whole purpose of God to the flock.

The Greek word there for "be on guard" (v.28) is *pros-echo*, meaning, to be attentive to, to be aware of, to turn your mind toward a person or thing. Being on guard entails paying close attention to something and keeping watch over it. Elders are to attend to two things: themselves and the flock.

Why must an elder pay close attention to himself? Isn't that selfish? No. It's responsible. An elder is the leader of the flock. If the shepherd goes down, the sheep will go down with him. That's why Paul tells Timothy elsewhere, "Pay close attention to yourself and your doctrine. Persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you" (1 Tim. 4:16).

How do we obey this command? By reading our Bibles. By steadfast praying. By reading good doctrinal books that instruct us in biblical doctrine and keep us faithful to the biblical text in our teaching. By mutually edifying friendships and discipleship relationships. By accountability relationships. By giving and receiving godly encouragement and criticism to each other.

We're also to pay close attention to all the flock. Why does Paul say "all" the flock? To help the elders avoid the danger of favoritism.

What kinds of things are we watching out for when we pay close attention to the flock? Based on what Paul says in verses 29 and 30, we're to watch out for false teachers, false doctrines, false methods, and false practices that draw disciples away from the flock. We're not called to examine the vitality of people's social lives or their financial status. We're called to look at their doctrine, their practice, and how those doctrines and practices affect both their own spiritual state and the spiritual state of others in the church. This is what it means to be overseers of the flock. We oversee the doctrine and practice of our flock, and how both impact the spiritual growth or spiritual atrophy of the congregation. We want to ask ourselves questions like these:

- Is the doctrine and practice making the church and its members stronger or weaker, spiritually speaking?
- Are they being fed on the best grass?
- Are they being given pure water to drink?
- Are they biting one another or are they caring for one another?
- Are there goats among the sheep who domineer the weaker ones, or do the stronger ones help to protect the weaker?

Where do these dangers, these wolves, come from in verses 29 and 30? They come from both outside the flock and inside the flock. Therefore, elders have to be on the lookout for dangers from within and without.

To reflect further on the dangers from within for a moment, an elder must pay attention to the relationships inside the church between natural leaders and followers: "from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things," Paul says. Someone in the church, maybe even an elder, might rise up and teach things contrary to sound doctrine.

How do we oversee those kinds of internal dynamics? Small groups are one way. When a man leads a small group, he has a better relational sense of different individuals in the congregation. Another way is to provide clear biblical and doctrinal direction for the church generally. This should be done through the pulpit, through Sunday School, through the statement of faith, through a church newsletter, and through any number of other venues. The clearer sound doctrine is in a church, the clearer any challenges to sound doctrine become.

In order to reflect further on the dangers from without for a moment, recall what Paul says in verse 29: "savage wolves will come in among you [from the outside], not sparing the flock." There are people teaching bad doctrine "out there," and we need to make sure we're protecting the flock from these kinds of influences, whether the influences are coming from community Bible studies, conferences, or books sold at the Christian bookstore.

How do we oversee such external dynamics? By personal Bible reading so that we're saturating ourselves in the truth. By personal prayer for the light of the Holy Spirit to give us the mind of Christ on his Word. By reading good theological books that reinforce biblical truth. By reading bad books carefully to discern where their dangers and errors lie. By studying church history to see where the church has erred in the past.

(Luke calls these men "elders" in verse 17, but Paul calls them "overseers" in verse 28, overseers who shepherd the flock. Scripture treats these words as interchangeable. The Greek term *episkopos*, which we translate bishop or overseer, is used interchangeably with *presbuteros*, "elder," as well as with the "shepherd" word group, *poimen*. An elder *is* an overseer, who *is* a pastor/shepherd. There is no distinction. They all point to the same office. This is one of the main reasons we don't believe in bishops like the Roman Catholic church does.)

Overseeing dangers from within and without means being willing to step into that uncomfortable territory of admonishing other people. As Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders in verse 31, "Therefore, be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears." Again, what's the connection between Paul's ministry and the ministry he wants the Ephesian elders to have? He wants his ministry of heart-felt admonition to be the model for theirs. What does it mean to admonish someone? The Greek word is *nouth-e-teō*, from *nous*, mind, and *tith-ae-me*, to place. To admonish is to place something in someone's mind. It's to instruct or exhort or warn them (BAGD), particularly about the truth of God in Christ and the personal and corporate implications of this truth for God's people.

## PETER

### ***Suffer for the Sake of the Name***

When Peter first uses the metaphor of Christ as our shepherd, he uses it in the context of Christ's suffering, and Christ's call on Christians to follow in these very footsteps. Peter writes,

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds



you were healed. <sup>25</sup> For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls (1 Peter 2:21-25).

The Great Shepherd became a sacrificial lamb. His suffering as a substitute for all who repent and believe is unique. There's nothing for us to emulate here. Only Christ's sacrifice can atone for sin. At the same time, Peter does say that Christ suffered "as an example for us to follow in His steps."

Again, this passage is directed to Christians in general, but how might it apply to elders in particular? Becoming a shepherd is a call to Christ-like self-sacrifice for the spiritual good of the sheep. Being a shepherd after the example of the Great Shepherd means being called to suffer for the sheep. At the very least, it means being called to a willingness to suffer for their spiritual protection and advancement in the gospel. We're not to have a messiah complex, as if we're the ones who must do the saving. That doesn't honor Christ. He is honored when we prove our willingness to sacrifice of ourselves in order to do spiritual good to his sheep.

This passage also calls elders to personal and practical holiness in the context of suffering on behalf of God's flock. Jesus committed no sin as our example of suffering, and we should commit no sin when we suffer for the spiritual good of his sheep.

Are we willing to suffer for Christ's sheep? How do we become willing to suffer? We must ask him to increase our love and respect for the glory of God and the way in which it's magnified by our suffering on the flock's behalf. Only his Spirit can increase our love for Christ, working it into our hearts by his Spirit.

The connection between an elder's call and the willingness to suffer becomes even more clear in chapter 5.

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (1 Peter 5:1-4).

The word "Therefore" in verse 1 connects us back to the preceding text in chapter 4, where Peter relates our suffering as Christians to God's glory as our Creator and Redeemer. As he says in verse 14, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." Then in verse 16: "if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name." It's in this context of Christian suffering and self-denial for the sake of God's glory that Peter says, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you." Here, then, shepherding is explicitly linked to suffering for the name of Christ. In other words, the call to shepherding the flock is a call to suffering for the glory of Christ in a particular way, by performing a particular service to God's people. The elder's willingness to suffer for Christ's glory should be a model for the members of their churches. Elders should be "first in line," as it were, leading the rest.

### ***Voluntarily and Eagerly***

How else are elders called to shepherd the flock here? By exercising oversight. The exercise of oversight is the participle that describes the command to shepherd. The word for exercising oversight is *episkopeō*, from which we get the word "overseer" or "bishop." It means to look after or care for. We shepherd people by looking after them, giving attention to their spiritual condition.

Elders should perform this oversight voluntarily.

Elders should do this work with eagerness.

And elders should prove themselves examples to the flock.

How does Peter want God's under-shepherds to be examples? It seems to be through their humility. Peter instructs them not to lord it over the sheep in their care. Notice that the very next command for all his readers in verse 5 is for us to clothe ourselves with humility, and in verse 6 to humble ourselves. As one commentator has written, "Elders are not to enter the ministry so they can boss others around but so they can exemplify the character of Christ to those under their charge."<sup>c</sup> Elders are examples, *tupoi*, types of Christ.

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<sup>c</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Peter, Jude* (B&H, 2003), 235.

Peter goes on to say here that “when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” Suffering as shepherds leads to glory from the Chief Shepherd. Why does he mention this? As an incentive to faithfulness. If we are to be willing to suffer for the flock as Christ suffered and died, then we have to have a horizon that extends beyond this life and into the next. We won't be willing to suffer if our thoughts and prayers are full of this-worldly concerns. We have to have heaven in our hearts in order to endure suffering for the flock in a holy and God-honoring way. Eternal joy with God is what keeps our suffering in this world in the right perspective.

## REVELATION

Finally, what do we learn about both the Great Shepherd and the work of under-shepherding in the final book of the Bible? Let's begin in chapter 7:

Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. "For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. "They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 7:13-17).

The Shepherd Lamb in verse 17 guides his sheep to the springs of the water of life. As his under-shepherds, that, too, must be our destination with the sheep that God has portioned to us. We must guide the flock to the springs of the water of life. We are to show them Christ crucified in the power of the Spirit by our words, by our example, and by the direction we lead the church.

The apostle's words in chapter 14 then point us toward the themes we've been tracing to their most glorious pitch, as the Shepherd-who-is-the-Lamb stands gathered with his flock.

Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless (Rev. 14:1-5).

In Laniak's words, “The heavenly Jerusalem, it turns out, was all along as much anticipated by the deserts and dispersions of the community's journey as by the earthly city bearing its name. In both experiences the Shepherd-Lamb was teaching them to follow Him to their real home” (245).

## CONCLUSION

As under-shepherds of Jesus Christ, we shepherd his flock not simply through this world, but into the next. Our great business as elders is to ensure the salvation of those who listen to us and follow us (1 Tim. 4:16). We are not adequate in ourselves for such an eternal responsibility, but “our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant....” And he makes us adequate by his Word: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” Praise God for his grace and for the power of his Word that both equip us for the task. May we trust him wholly in this work, that we might find him wholly true.

*Paul Alexander is the pastor of Fox Valley Bible Church in St. Charles, Illinois and the co-author (with Mark Dever) of The Deliberate Church (Crossway, 2005).*

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## How Ligon Trains His Men

*Here's how one healthy church trains incoming elders and deacons.*

*Editor's note:* 9Marks asked Ligon Duncan, senior minister of First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Mississippi, how they train men for the office of elder. We reprint FPC's remarkable "Officer Training Manual" here (unedited), not to promote any one book, theological system, or form of polity, but in order (i) to present one viable model of elder training and (ii) to impress upon our readers the care with which churches of every polity and theological leaning should take in elder training.

### Outline:

- Introduction
- Guidelines for Study
- Resource Materials
- Assigned Reading Schedule
- Weekly Class Schedule
- Session 1 to 8 (questions for preparation)

### Introduction to the Course

Congratulations on your having been recommended for nomination as a church officer. After the completion of this course of study, those approved by the Session will stand for election before the congregation. Before standing for election, however, all nominees will complete the training process in order that you will be well equipped to serve in the great work to which you have been nominated. This process will be (we hope) a blessing both to you as individual trainees and to the church at large. For those ultimately elected, it will serve to prepare you for office. For those not elected, it will prepare you for wider service in the church and for more effective witness in the community. For the congregation as a whole, it will provide a large group of men, officers and non-officers, all of whom will be better able to build up the body.

If our church is to be governed by Biblical and Reformed principles, and is to continue in its commitment to the faith once-delivered, then it is necessary that those nominated and ultimately elected to church office should be committed to Christ, His Word and His Church. This training program is thus designed to accomplish at least two things. First, it aims to ensure that all potential officers can make an honest, informed, and wholehearted affirmation of the ordination vows (see *PCA Book of Church Order* 24-5). Second, it aims to equip our nominees to serve, if elected, with the knowledge and resources required for the fulfillment of the office.

### Guidelines for Study

The training period will be divided into eight sessions, stretching over eight weeks, as indicated by the course schedule. You can choose to attend either the Sunday afternoon or the Wednesday night class. Each prospective officer will be given a set of resource books, along with this study booklet which contains questions for study. Each man is asked to research and answer the questions at home. You are asked to briefly write out your answers in the space provided or on a separate sheet. It is important that you write out your answers in your own words, even if you think you already know the answer. The discipline of this process will be quite helpful educationally. Remember to keep your answers brief and to the point. Answers can be found within the resource books. The following will also be helpful to you in your studies:

(1) Review (and remember!) the answers to the following Shorter Catechism questions: 1, 4, 14, 33, 86, 87, 98. You will need to be able to give the answer to five of them, from memory, on the final exam.

(2) Read carefully through the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. The theology test will cover the Confession and Catechisms with true/false, fill in the blank, and matching questions.

(3) Review your notes from the class on Church Government and read through your *Book of Church Order (BCO)*. The Church Government section of the test will be short answer and multiple choice questions. These questions can be answered straight out of the *BCO*.

(4) Make sure you have your copy of the *Westminster Confession*, *Shorter Catechism*, and *BCO* with you when you begin to take the test. You will be able to consult them *on certain portions* of the exam.

You should do your assigned reading ahead of time. When we meet together in class, we will discuss our work. Obviously, class attendance is an imperative. Any absences must be approved and made up. Audio tapes will be provided for those who miss a session.



## Resource Materials

### REQUIRED READING:

John R. DeWitt, ***What is the Reformed Faith?***

A former RTS professor's outline of the basics of Reformed doctrine and practice.

Ken Keyes, ***A Brief History of the PCA***

A little eight-page essay packed with interesting historical details.

Albert N. Martin, ***The Practical Implications of Calvinism***

An excellent pamphlet introducing the experiential side Reformed faith.

John Nicholls, ***A Holy Moderation***

A brief article setting forth some of the benefits of the presbyterian form of government.

***PCA Book of Church Order***

The BCO is part of the constitution of our denomination. Every officer should be acquainted with it.

Mark Ross, ***Elders as Shepherds of the Church of God***

Mark Ross's helpful treatment of the office of elder will aid your understanding of the true nature of this spiritual office.

Mark Ross, ***The Role of the Deacons***

An excellent little pamphlet (only 6 pages) explaining the biblical duties of deacons.

Steele and Thomas, ***The Five Points of Calvinism***

A good Scriptural presentation of the doctrines of grace, by two Baptist ministers.

Rowland Ward, ***Baptism in Scripture and History***

Perhaps THE best, short treatment of the subject from a paedo-baptist perspective.

***The Westminster Confession of Faith*** (PCA)

Our denomination's doctrinal standards, to which every officer must subscribe.

Thomas Witherow, ***The Apostolic Church: Which is it?***

Classic presentation of the six Biblical grounds of presbyterian government.

### RECOMMENDED AUDIO TAPE SERIES

Derek Thomas, **Introduction to Reformed Theology** (Available via the Church Tape Library/Ministry)

**ASSIGNED READING SCHEDULE:  
Topics, Times, and Assignments**

**Session One** (April 14, 3:30-5:30pm)

**1. The Nature of the Offices of Elder and Deacon**

Assigned Reading: Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1  
Ross, *Elders as Shepherds of the Church of God* (all) [6 pages]  
Ross, *The Role of the Deacons* (all) [6 pages]

**Session Two** (April 21, 3:30-5:30pm)

**2. The Qualifications for and Duties of the Offices of Elder and Deacon**

Assigned Reading: Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1 (again)  
*The PCA Book of Church Order* (chapters 7-9) [6 pages]  
*The Westminster Confession of Faith* (all)[14 pages (of text)]

**Session Three** (April 28, 3:30-5:30pm)

**3. The Spiritual Life of the Elder and Deacon**

Assigned Reading: Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1 (again!)  
Martin, *Practical Implications of Calvinism* [23 pages]  
Reminder: Your testimony is due today at the beginning of class.

**Session Four**(May 5, 3:30-5:30pm)

**4. Presbyterian History**

Assigned reading: Keyes, *Brief History of the PCA* (all)[8 pages]  
DeWitt, *What is the Reformed Faith?* (all) [24 pages]

**Session Five** (May 12, 3:30-5:30pm)

**5. Presbyterian Doctrine**

Assigned Reading: Steele and Thomas, *Five Points of Calvinism* (all)[91 pages]  
*The Westminster Confession of Faith* (again)[14 pages (of text)]

**Session Six** (May 19, 3:30-5:30pm)

**6. Presbyterian Doctrine**

Assigned Reading: Steele and Thomas, *Five Points of Calvinism* (again)[91 pages]

**Session Seven** (May 26, 3:30-5:30pm)

**7. Sacraments**

Assigned Reading: Ward, *Baptism in Scripture and History* (all) [72 pages]  
Reminder: Take Home Exam [Due Friday, June 7]

**Session Eight** (June 2, 3:30-5:30pm)

**8. Church Government and Book of Church Order**

Assigned Reading: *The PCA Book of Church Order* (all) [63 chapters]  
Witherow, *The Apostolic Church: Which is it?* (all)[61 pages]  
Nicholls, *A Holy Moderation* [5 pages]  
Reminder: Take Home Exam [Due Friday, June 7]

## WEEKLY CLASS SCHEDULE:

<b>Session One</b> (April 14, 3:30-5:30pm)	<i>Leader/Duration</i>
1. Overview of the Course and Requirements	Duncan (15 mins)
2. The Nature of the Offices of Elder and Deacon	Duncan (45 mins)
3. Group Review of Homework (Study Questions)	Teams (45 mins)
<b>Session Two</b> (April 21, 3:30-5:30pm)	<i>Leader/Duration</i>
1. The Qualifications for and Duties of the Offices	Duncan (45 mins)
2. Group Review of Homework (Study Questions)	Teams (45 mins)
3. Question & Answer/Comment Session	Duncan/Hughes (15 mins)
<b>Session Three</b> (April 28, 3:30-5:30pm)	<i>Leader/Duration</i>
1. The Spiritual Life of the Church Officer	Duncan (45 mins)
2. Group Review of Homework (Study Questions/Testimonies)	Teams (45 mins)
3. Question & Answer/Comment Session	Duncan/Hughes (15 mins)
<b>Session Four</b> (May 5, 3:30-5:30pm)	<i>Leader/Duration</i>
1. Presbyterian History	Duncan (45 mins)
2. Group Review of Homework (Study Questions)	Teams (45 mins)
3. Question & Answer/Comment Session	Duncan/Hughes (15 mins)
<b>Session Five</b> (May 12, 3:30-5:30pm)	<i>Leader/Duration</i>
1. Presbyterian Doctrine	Duncan (50 mins)
2. Group Review of Homework (Study Questions)	Teams (40 mins)
3. Question & Answer/Comment Session	Duncan/Hughes (15 mins)
<b>Session Six</b> (May 19, 3:30-5:30pm)	<i>Leader/Duration</i>
1. Presbyterian Doctrine	Thomas (50 mins)
2. Group Review of Homework (Study Questions)	Teams (40 mins)
3. Question & Answer/Comment Session	Thomas/Hughes (15 mins)
<b>Session Seven</b> (May 26, 3:30-5:30pm)	<i>Leader/Duration</i>
1. Sacraments	Duncan (50 mins)
2. Group Review of Homework/Catechism A's	Teams (40 mins)
3. Question & Answer/Comment Session	Duncan/Hughes (15 mins)
4. Hand out Exam	Hughes (5 mins)
<b>Session Eight</b> (June 2, 3:30-5:30pm)	<i>Leader/Duration</i>
1. Church Government and BCO	Duncan (50 mins)
2. Group Review of Homework (Study Questions)	Teams (40 mins)
3. Question & Answer/Comment Session	Duncan/Hughes (15 mins)

**Session One:  
The Nature of the Offices of Deacon and Elder**

***Class Study Questions***  
(to be completed before class)

**Sources:**       **Acts 6, 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1**  
                  ***The PCA Book of Church Order*** (Chapter 9)  
                  Ross, ***The Role of the Deacons in the Overall Mission of the Church*** (all)

1. Now that you have just been recommended for nomination to the office of elder or deacon, what things could you do to prepare yourself for this ministry?
2. Where in Scripture did the office of deacon originate and why? What does deacon mean?
3. Where in Scripture will you find the qualifications for a deacon?
4. List some of the responsibilities of the deacon.
5. According to Scripture, is it necessary for deacons to have the same spiritual qualities as elders? Why or why not?
6. Why is it so essential that your conduct be in accord with Christian principles in every area of life?
7. Where (or with whom) does authority lie in a Biblically governed and Reformed church? Are you able to follow the leadership of the elders wholeheartedly?
8. What qualities are necessary for deacons according to 1 Timothy 3:8-13? If you are a deacon nominee, do you see them in yourself?
9. Compare your answers with the qualities required of the elder in 1 Timothy 3. What are the differences?
10. Are you the kind of person who can motivate others (model how) to serve God in the ministry of mercy? (Deacon nominees only)
11. How can a deacon help develop the grace of giving in the congregation?
12. What is the deacon's responsibility regarding attendance of the stated services of the church?



**Session Two:  
The Qualifications for and Duties of the Offices  
of Elder and Deacon**

***Class Study Questions***  
(to be completed before class)

**Sources:**     **1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, Acts 20:17-28**  
***Elders as Shepherds of the Church of God*, by Mark E. Ross**  
***The PCA Book of Church Order*** (Chapter 8 and 16)

1. What specific things do the following passages teach us about the eldership?  
Acts 14:23, I Timothy 5:17, Ephesians 4:11.
2. Two Bible passages state the qualifications for an elder and say he should be blameless. What are these passages and in what way is he to be blameless?
3. Where does the authority lie in a Biblically governed and Reformed Church? How does an elder exercise oversight?
4. From I Timothy 3:1-15, what are the qualities required in those who are chosen to exercise oversight in a congregation? Note what Paul says (A) About their personal character (B) About their abilities (C) About their Christian experiences (D) About their general reputations.
5. Compare the qualifications necessary for a deacon in 1 Timothy 3. What are the differences?
6. Compare the qualifications for elder given in Titus 1:6-9 with those in 1 Timothy 3. What are the similarities and differences of emphasis?
7. What does the ***PCA BCO*** 8-3 say about the elder's responsibilities in the church? Are these things you feel called to do?  
(Elder nominees only)
9. Ross argues that Elders are to "shepherd the flock." According to him, what exactly does that mean?
10. What do the ***PCA BCO*** 8-8 and 8-9 teach about Ruling Elders?
11. Do you see in yourself the basic Biblical qualifications for the office of Ruling Elder? (Elder nominees only)
12. Do you sense a divine calling to the office of Ruling Elder (see ***PCA BCO*** 16)?(Elder nominees only)

**Session Three:**  
**The Spiritual Life of the Elder and Deacon**  
**Questions to Consider for Prospective Church Officers**  
**Class Study Questions**  
 (to be completed before class)

**Source: Personal reflection and self-examination**

**I. In the Area of Personal Faith**

1. Do you believe in the necessity of regeneration? Have you been born anew?
2. Do you know God? Is your trust in Christ? Is your life God-centered?
3. Do you use the means of growth such as prayer and Bible study on your own regularly?

**II. In the Area of Support of the Program of the Church**

1. Will you attend Sunday School?
2. Will you attend the regular worship services of the Church?
3. Will you attend the regular meetings of the Board of Officers on which you serve?

**III. In the Area of Stewardship**

1. Do you believe in tithing and make a sincere effort to do so?
2. Will you support the church budget?
3. Will you give of your time as needed to carry on the leadership of the church?

**IV. In the Area of Cooperation**

1. Are you in good relations with the church and its members?
2. Are you in good relations with the other officers?
3. Are you in good relations with the Pastor?

**V. In the Area of Seeking the Purity, Peace and Unity of the Church**

1. Will you try to put down murmurings and complainings? Can you face them frankly, deal with them fairly, and then stand loyally with the majority in their decision?
2. Can you answer the questions in the *Book of Church Order* paragraph 24-5 in the affirmative?

**VI. In the Area of Family Life**

1. Have you any serious domestic troubles?
2. Do you and your wife know how to hold your tongue against needlessly spreading gossip or talking critically about others?
3. Are you involved in financial difficulties that might embarrass the church?
4. Do you make an effort at having family devotions?
5. Do you control your own household as called for in 1Timothy 3:4, 5?

**VII. In the Area of Social Life**

1. Have you seriously considered the admonitions in Scripture about the dangers of being a stumbling block and the need for specific caution and exemplary conduct in every area for Church Officers?
2. To the best of your ability, will you keep the Lord's Day above reproach?

**Briefly write out the testimony to God's grace in your life.**

(To be handed in at the beginning of the third session)

**Session Four:  
Presbyterian History**

***Class Study Questions***  
(to be completed before class)

**Source:** *A Brief History of the PCA*, by Ken Keyes

1. What were some of the causes of concern that startled conservatives in the PCUS to begin to work for reform in the Southern Presbyterian Church?
2. What was the "Fellowship of St. James?"
3. What vehicle was established to inform and encourage conservatives in the PCUS?
4. What three organizations were instrumental in the formation of the PCA?
5. Who was appointed to the Steering Committee to explore the formation of a new denomination?
6. When was the first General Assembly of the PCA held? Where?
7. Bonus Question (not answered in the pamphlet): Why was December 4 chosen by the first General Assembly as the day on which to send out our "Message to all churches?"

**Session Five:  
Presbyterian Doctrine (part 1)**

***Class Study Questions***  
(to be completed before class)

**Sources:** *Five Points of Calvinism*, by Steele and Thomas (FPC)  
*The Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF) {The following study questions are organized according to the chapters of the WCF.}

**Chapter I (WCF)**

1. What are the two types of revelation? How are they different?
2. What does the *Confession* mean when it asserts that God's former ways of revelation have ceased?
3. What do we mean when we say the Bible is inspired?
4. How are we to interpret Scripture?
5. Does the Holy Spirit speak apart from Scripture? Explain.

**Chapter II (WCF)**

1. When the Confession calls God "a most pure Spirit," what does that mean and imply?
2. Distinguish the doctrine of the Trinity from tri-theism.
3. What do we mean when we say the persons of the Godhead are of one substance, power, and eternity? Why is this important?

**Chapter III (WCF)**

1. In a sentence or a phrase, what is God's eternal decree?
2. Is God's decree "conditional?" Explain.
3. If God has ordained "whatsoever comes to pass" how is he not responsible for sin?
4. What is the difference between God's foreknowledge and God's predestination?
5. The *Confession* says that the doctrine of predestination "is to be handled with special prudence and care." What are the practical applications of such a doctrine?

**Chapter IV (WCF)**

1. The *Confession* asserts that God created the world "of nothing" (*ex nihilo*) "in the space of six days." What is the theological significance of these statements?
2. The *Confession* 4.2, gives a detailed account of the endowments that God gave man when He created him. Compile and organize these.
3. What do we mean when we say "man is created in the image of God?"
4. What are some practical implications of the Christian doctrine of creation in light of current secular thought?

**Chapter V (WCF)**

1. What is the difference between “fate” and “Divine Sovereignty?”
2. What does the *Confession* mean by “second causes?” How does this help explain how God can be sovereign and yet not responsible for sin?
3. According to the *Confession*, does God’s sovereignty extend even to the fall of Adam, and other wicked deeds?
4. According to the *Confession* 5.5, why does God sometimes leave His own people to face temptations and inner corruptions?
5. According to the *Confession* 5.6, does God “harden” sinners or do they “harden” themselves?

#### **Chapter VI (WCF)**

1. What happened when our first parents fell? That is what were the consequences of the “fall of man” recorded in Genesis 3?
2. What does "total depravity" mean?
3. What does the *Confession* mean when it says that “the guilt of this sin [Adam and Eve’s fall] was imputed . . . to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation?” Theologians call this the imputation of Adam’s sin. Explain.
4. What is the difference between “original corruption” and “actual transgressions?”
5. Are we sinners because we sin, or do we sin because we are sinners?

#### **Chapter VII (WCF)**

1. What is the "Covenant of Works?" Explain.
2. What is the "Covenant of Grace?" Explain.
3. What are the differences in the Covenant of Grace as it was administered in the time of the law, and as it is administered now under the Gospel?
4. Are there two covenants of Grace?

#### **Chapter VIII (WCF)**

1. What are the principle doctrines about the person and work of Christ set forth in the *Confession*, chapter 8?
2. In what way is Christ a Prophet? (Make sure to look at the *Catechism*)
3. In what way is Christ a Priest? (Make sure to look at the *Catechism*)
4. In what way is Christ a King? (Make sure to look at the *Catechism*)
5. Why was it necessary for Christ to be both God and man?
6. What does “limited or definite atonement” (sometimes called “particular redemption”) mean?
7. What is wrong with the statement, "Christ died for everybody?"

#### **Chapter IX (WCF)**

1. What do we mean by “free will?”

2. How does a Calvinistic view of free will differ from an Arminian view?
3. What do we mean (theologically speaking) by “man is free to do what he wants to do?”
4. What are the four states of man, as set forth in the *Confession*, chapter 9?
5. Do all people have “the ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation?”
6. Why is a regenerated person not able to do good perfectly in this life?
7. What is “perfectionism?”

#### **Chapter X (WCF)**

1. What is “effectual calling?”
2. Is this “calling” conditional?
3. What does this chapter say about the status of infants who die in infancy, and others who are unable to be called outwardly by the word?

#### **Chapter XI (WCF)**

1. Who justifies?
2. What does “justify” mean?
3. What do we mean by “justification by faith alone?”
4. What is the “ground” or “basis” of our justification?
5. What is the difference between a Protestant and Roman Catholic view of justification? What is the significance of this difference?

#### **Chapter XII (WCF)**

1. What is adoption?
2. Is God the Father of all men? Explain.
3. Give a pastoral application of the doctrine of adoption.

#### **Chapter XIII (WCF)**

1. What is sanctification?
2. Can a person be regenerated and justified, without being further sanctified?
3. Are we active or passive in sanctification? Explain. What is the significance of this?

#### **Chapter XIV (WCF)**

1. What is saving faith? Whose work is it?
2. What are the principle acts of saving faith?

**Chapter XV (WCF)**

1. What is repentance? Can a person truly believe on Christ without repentance?
2. If the believer is forgiven of his sins, why should he continue to repent?

**Chapter XVI (WCF)**

1. What, according to the *Confession* 16.1-2, is a “good work?”
2. Can an unbeliever do any “good works” in the sight of God? Explain.
3. From whence comes our ability to do good works?
4. Can we merit pardon of sin by our good works? Why or why not?

**Chapter XVII (WCF)**

1. Can a true believer lose his or her salvation?
2. Can a believer fall into grievous sin?
3. What is the basis of the perseverance of the saints?

**Chapter XVIII (WCF)**

1. What does the “assurance of of grace and salvation” mean?
2. What is the basis of this assurance?
3. Do all Christians have this assurance? Why or why not?
4. Can a believer’s assurance be shaken, diminished or intermitted? How?
5. Are true believers ever utterly destitute of the evidences of the Spirit’s work, from which assurance may be revived?
6. Should all Christians desire a full assurance of grace and salvation?

**Source: *The Five Points of Calvinism*, by Steele and Thomas**

1. What are the five points of Arminianism (the “Remonstrants”)?
2. Describe each of the five points of Calvinism and briefly support them from Scripture.

**Session Six:  
Presbyterian Doctrine (part 2)**

***Class Study Questions***  
(to be completed before class)

**Sources:** *Five Points of Calvinism*, by Steele and Thomas (FPC)  
*The Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF) {The following study questions are organized according to the chapters of the WCF.}

**Chapter XIX (WCF)**

1. Are Christians under obligation to keep the law of God?
2. What is the "ceremonial law?" What was its purpose?
3. What are the three classes of Biblical law, according to the *Confession*? Which are still in force?
4. What does the *Confession* 19.6 say about our relation to the moral law? Summarize.

**Chapter XX (WCF)**

1. What is the difference between "liberty" and "license?"
2. In what does our Christian liberty consist, according to the *Confession*?
3. In what ways do new covenant believers have greater freedom than old covenant believers?
4. What does it mean that God is "Lord of the conscience?"
5. Would it be wrong to do something against the conscience? Why?

**Chapter XXI (WCF)**

1. State the "regulative principle." Contrast it with the Lutheran and Roman Catholic views.
2. What does the *Confession* mean when it says that the acceptable way of worship is "instituted" and "limited?"
3. What are the elements of ordinary worship of God?
4. How is the Sabbath Day to be observed?

**Chapter XXII (WCF)**

1. What is the difference between an "oath" and a "vow?"
2. What is the purpose of an oath, a vow?

**Chapter XXIII (WCF)**

1. What is the basis of the authority of the civil government?
2. Should a Christian obey the civil law? Can a Christian be involved in secular civil government?
3. How does the American version of the *Confession* 23.3 differ from the original version?



**Chapter XXIV (WCF)**

1. Why did God institute marriage?
2. What is the *Confession's* position on so-called "same-sex marriage?"
3. What are the Scriptural grounds for divorce?
4. According to the *Confession*, should a Christian ever marry a non-Christian? Should Protestants marry Roman Catholics?
5. What are "degrees of consanguinity or affinity?" What does *Confession* 24.4 teach?

**Chapter XXV (WCF)**

1. What do we mean by the "invisible" Church?
2. What do we mean by the "visible" Church?
3. Are these two different churches?
4. Is it possible for the "visible" church to be completely pure? Why?
5. Who is the Head of the Church? What of the claims of others in this regard?

**Chapter XXVI (WCF)**

1. What do we mean by "union with Christ?"
2. Does this "union with Christ" mean that believers become divine?

**Chapter XXXII (WCF)**

1. What happens to believers at death? What happens to unbelievers at death?
2. Is there such a thing as purgatory? Explain.
3. What is meant by the "resurrection of the dead?"
4. At the last day what will happen to the believer? What will happen to the unbeliever?

**Chapter XXXIII (WCF)**

1. What is meant by the last judgment?
2. What is the purpose of this judgment? Who will be judged?
3. What is going to happen to the believer at the judgment? What about the unbeliever?
4. Why has Christ not made known the timing of the last judgment?

**Session Seven:  
Sacraments**

***Class Study Questions***  
(to be completed before class)

**Sources:** *Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF)* {The following study questions are organized according to the chapters of the WCF.}  
*Baptism in Scripture and History*

**Chapter XXVII (WCF)**

1. What is a sacrament?
2. In what sense is a sacrament a sign? In what sense is it a seal?
3. How many sacraments were ordained by Christ?
4. How is God's grace conferred in our taking of the sacraments?
5. In what ways are baptism and circumcision the same?
6. In what ways are the Lord's supper and the Passover the same?

**Chapter XXVIII (WCF)**

1. What is Baptism? What does it signify?
2. Should children of believers be baptized? Why?
3. Is it necessary to be "immersed" to be baptized?
4. Can a person be saved without being baptized? Explain
5. Can a person be baptized without being saved?

**Chapter XXIX (WCF)**

1. What is the meaning of the Lord's Supper and when was it instituted?
2. What are the elements in the Lord's Supper? What do these elements represent?
3. In what way is Christ present in the Lord's Supper? Is He present in the elements?
4. Is it ever proper to administer this sacrament "privately?" Why?

**Source:** *Baptism in Scripture and History*

1. Give a summary of Ward's Scriptural arguments concerning the mode of baptism.  
(See Ward, part 1) Which is more biblical: immersion or affusion (pouring/sprinkling)?
2. Give a brief sketch of the history of baptismal practice in the Christian tradition.  
(See Ward, part 1) What conclusions do you draw from this history?
3. Give a biblical argument for administering baptism to the children of believers.  
(See Ward, pages 69-72)

**Session Eight:  
Church Government and Book of Church Order**

***Class Study Questions***  
(to be completed before class)

**Sources:** ***Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF)*** {The following study questions are organized according to the chapters of the WCF.}

**Chapter XXX (WCF)**

1. What is meant by saying Christ has “appointed a government” in His Church?
2. What is the purpose of Church censures (a.k.a. church discipline)?
3. Why is it important to maintain Church discipline?
4. What happens to a Church that neglects Church discipline?

**Chapter XXXI (WCF)**

1. Why should we have synods and councils?
2. Is it possible for a Church Council to make a mistake?
3. What matters should a Church Court concern itself with?
4. Does this mean that the Gospel is not regulative of political matters for the Christian?
5. How does the Church rightly influence political affairs?
6. When may the Church concern itself directly, as an organized body, with political matters?

**Sources:** **Book of Church Order (BCO)** Chapters are indicated in the BCO.  
**The Apostolic Church: Which is it?, by Thomas Witherow (TAC:WII) Preface (BCO)**

1. Who is the Head of the Church?
2. Where did the Church receive its system of government and discipline?
3. In your own words, give phrase-length summaries of the preliminary principles.
4. Which documents make up the constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America?

**Chapter 1 (BCO) (TAC:WII)**

1. Name the various kinds of church government, which kind of government is the PCA? Support our form of government from Scripture.
2. What does “Ecclesiastical jurisdiction is not a several, but a joint power” mean?

**Chapter 2 (BCO) (BCG)**

1. Of whom does the visible church consist?
2. Is the unity of the Body of Christ destroyed by denominations?
3. What determines if a denomination is a true branch of the church of Jesus Christ?

**Chapter 3 (BCO)**

1. What are the two types of Ecclesiastical power?
2. What are the sole functions of the Church?
3. When does the exercise of church power have divine sanction?

**Chapter 4 (BCO)**

1. What is a "particular church?"
2. Who has the power of jurisdiction in the particular church?
3. What are the ordinances established by Christ?

**Chapter 5 (BCO)**

1. Who has authority to organize a church?

**Chapter 6 (BCO)**

1. Who are the members of the church?
2. What is the difference between communing and non-communing members?

**Chapter 7 (BCO)**

1. What were the extraordinary offices of the New Testament? Do we have them today?
2. What are the ordinary and perpetual classes of office in the Church?

**Chapter 8 (BCO) | Timothy 3, Titus 1**

1. Compare the offices of Teaching and Ruling Elder.

**Chapter 9 (BCO) Acts 6**

1. Describe the office of Deacon as indicated in the **BCO** and support from the Scriptures.

**Chapters 10 (BCO)**

1. Why do we speak of the "courts" of the Church, in reference to our various graded assemblies of elders? (Hint: see **BCO** 11-2)
2. Name the church courts.

**Chapters 11 (BCO)**

1. What is the jurisdiction of church courts?

**Chapter 12 (BCO)**

1. Of whom does the Church Session consist?
2. List some of the specific duties of the church Session.

**Chapter 13 (BCO)**

1. List some of the specific duties of the Presbytery.

**Chapter 14 (BCO)**

1. List some of the specific duties of the General Assembly.

**Chapter 15 (BCO)**

1. Describe the difference between a committee and a commission.

**Chapter 16 (BCO)**

1. Can any man be placed over a church as Pastor without the consent of that church?
2. Why is every candidate for any office to be examined and approved before serving?

**Chapter 17 (BCO)**

1. What is ordination?

**Chapter 24 (BCO)**

1. Review the ordination vows for elders and deacons. Can you heartily affirm them?

**Chapter 25 (BCO)**

1. What is the procedure for calling a congregational meeting?
2. Section 7-12 of **BCO** 25 contains several important statements. Outline the highlights.

**Chapter 26 (BCO)**

1. What is the procedure for amending the *BCO*?
2. What is the procedure for amending the *Confession of Faith*?

**The Rules of Discipline****Chapter 27 (BCO)**

1. According to **BCO** 27, what is church discipline? In what two senses is the term used?
2. What are the aims of church discipline?

**Chapter 28 (BCO)**

1. How are we to provide discipline for noncommuning members?

**Chapter 29 (BCO)**

1. What constitutes an offense?

**Chapter 30 (BCO)**

1. What censures may be inflicted by church courts? Describe each of them.

**Chapters 31-33 (BCO)**

1. What is a “case of process?”
2. Who are the parties in a case of process?
3. Under what circumstances should a church court institute process?

**Chapters 39-46 (BCO)**

1. How do the acts and decisions of a lower court come under the supervision of a higher court?
2. Describe the higher courts’ work of “general review and control.”
3. What is a “reference?”
4. What is an “appeal?” On what grounds can it be made?
5. What is a “complaint?”
6. What is a “dissent?” What is a “protest?” What is an “objection?”
7. What is an “associate member?”

**Directory for the Worship of God****Chapter 47-55 (BCO)**

1. What are the proper elements of a worship service?
2. What are the responsibilities of every Christian on the Lord’s Day?
3. What ought to be included in every worship service?

**Chapter 56 (BCO)**

1. Discuss the practical aspects of the administration of Baptism (56-1,2, & 3).

**Chapter 58 (BCO)**

1. Discuss the practical aspects of the administration of the Lord's Supper (58-1,2, & 3).

**Chapters 62, 63 (BCO)**

1. Other than stated Lord’s Day service, what are two other special occasions for worship?

**Source: The Apostolic Church: Which is it?, by Thomas Witherow (TAC:WII)**

1. Give the six New Testament principles of church government.
2. Defend them from Scripture.
3. Compare independency and prelacy to that of the presbyterian view.



## Seminary Smarties—Now Showing At A Website Near You

BiblicalTraining.org gives lay elders an opportunity to take free seminary classes from top professors. We asked its founder to introduce it to you.

*By Bill Mounce*

BiblicalTraining.org (BT) was originally conceived as a resource for elder training, a place where people could access the best in evangelical training for free. Since its inception, however, it has moved far beyond this to providing, we hope, excellent seminary level education in English. And it's still—and always will be—free.

BT is divided into four sections.

- (1) The **Story of Jesus** is an evangelistic-friendly paraphrase of the gospel of John designed for the non-believer.
- (2) **New Believers** is a 12 part course that a new believer can take on his or her own or, preferably, with a mentor. The 250 page notebook helps develop the spiritual disciplines a new believer needs.
- (3) **Leadership Education** provides a full seminary course load taught by the finest evangelical teachers from a broad base of evangelical traditions. Listen to Dr. Robert Stein on hermeneutics, Dr. Doug Stuart on the Old Testament, Dr. Paul House on Old Testament theology, Dr. Bryan Chapel on homiletics, Dr. Bruce Ware on systematic theology, and many others.
- (4) **Foundations** are shorter courses geared for lay people who want an introduction to the topics covered in Leadership Education. For example, you can listen to Dr. Bill Mounce cover the New Testament in a format designed to be replicated in other churches (called The Biblical Training Institute).

You can even create your own class using BT materials as well as your own. The courses are all audio and come in various formats (including mp3), and some have transcriptions and/or outlines. BT is used by people in over 130 countries around the world.

Even though I have been a university and seminary professor and am now pastoring, I still find Leadership Development a difficult and demanding issue. What I am learning is that development falls into four areas: biblical content; biblical theology; character; and skills. BT provides all the resources you need for the first two categories, and we are working on classes for the other two (although we now have Bible Study skills covered).

If you are a pastor, my suggestion is to decide what classes or portion of classes to assign, let your elders and elders-in-training listen to the lectures, and then come together on a consistent basis to discuss not just the content but the application and implications of the material. My church uses a Sunday School class to facilitate such discussion.

As we know, the one qualification that separates elders from other roles in the church is that they be "able to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2). BiblicalTraining.org's goal is to enable elders, who would not otherwise have the time, money, or proximity to good evangelical training, become better teachers. And its price, we hope, reflects not the quality of the teachers, but their desire to build up Christ's church.

*Bill Mounce is the president of Biblical Training and the preaching pastor at Shiloh Hills Fellowship in Spokane, Washington. He is also the New Testament chair of the English Standard Version translation of the Bible.*

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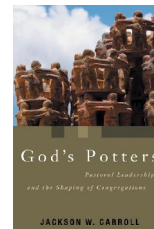
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## Should We Use Statistics to Measure Ministry?

### A Review Article: *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations*, by Jackson W. Carroll

Eerdmans, 2006, 296pp

Reviewed by Jonathan Leeman



Turn to the acknowledgment's section of political scientist Robert Putnam's book *Bowling Alone* and you'll find about four thousand research assistants mentioned—including me. Yes, if you have a copy of the book, I'd be happy to sign it. Hold the applause, please.

For one year in the mid-nineties, I sat in the Library of Congress and other archives in the Washington DC area, looking for decade-by-decade membership data on multiple clubs, associations, or civic organizations over the last 150 years in a twenty city sample—groups like the Peoria Main-Street Presbyterian Church; the Galveston Austrian Benevolent Association; the Lathers, Wood, Wire, and Metal Union Local No. 68 (Denver); or the St. Lawrence O'Tool's No. 32 Lodge of the Catholic Knights and Ladies of America (St. Louis). My job was to find this data, punch in the numbers cell by cell on a spreadsheet, and then email it to Putnam and his team, who processed it along with scores of figures from other political-science graduate-student lackeys.

I don't know if any of the data I found “made it” into the book *Bowling Alone* or not. Yet it was this kind of statistical data that provided the foundation for Professor Putnam's argument: Americans are less involved in civic organizations than ever before—from Masons, to Boy Scouts, to bowling leagues. The problem is, individuals learn how to be democratic citizens in such voluntary institutions. They learn how to cooperate, persuade, vote, and discuss their disagreements peaceably.

Fascinating stuff, I think. And Putnam's ability to marshal statistical “evidence” for his thesis gives life to the argument.

Putnam's work represents the love affair with statistics that became prevalent in social science departments in the latter half of the twentieth century. As the acids of postmodernism ate away at the foundations of so much philosophy, sociology, and historiography, many social scientists sought refuge (certitude) in the tools of the so-called hard sciences. The sea change was marked when a number of rational choice theorists, like University of Rochester political scientist William Riker or his student Kenneth Shepsle, now at Harvard with Putnam, were elected to the National Academy of Science. It's been said that when the generation of disciples who followed Riker began to fill top universities, the *American Political Science Review* began to look like a physics journal, filled with pages of calculus equations, charts, and regression analyses.[1]

Behind this love affair with numbers and equations are behaviorist assumptions that go back in time further still. Statistical and rational choice analyses represent the most evolved stage of a brand of social science that tries to explain, measure, and predict human behavior according to rational considerations, much like the bio-chemical diagnoses of today's lab-coated psychiatrists represent the most evolved and quantifiable stage of a way of thinking begun by the bespectacled Sigmund Freud, serenely leaning forward in his chair and asking patients about their dreams.

### FROM THE SOCIAL SCIENCE SHELF TO THE CHURCH SHELF

The year after I worked for Putnam, I was called to ministry and lost my aspirations to enter the academic world of political science. What surprises me to this day, however, is picking up a book in the “theology” or “church” section of the bookstore, and finding the same old secular tools being used but now for spiritual purposes. Such is the case with the book *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations*, by Jackson Carroll, a Methodist minister and Duke Divinity School professor.

*God's Potters* is one of seven books that has emerged from Duke Divinity School's massive research project on pastoral leadership in the United States, *Pulpit & Pew (P&P)*. This volume presents all the findings of the *P&P* project in page after page of charts and graphs that give the reader a picture of ministerial life today. Throughout, Carroll writes from his “perspective as a social scientist and also an ordained minister” (x).

The data come from several sources: (i) a telephone survey of 1,231 senior or solo pastors conducted for *P&P* in 2001 by the University of Chicago; (ii) twenty-three focus groups of a diverse set of pastors; and (iii) the U.S. Congregational Life Survey of pastoral leaders in 434 congregations. Survey findings are grouped into four traditions: Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, conservative Protestant or evangelical, and historic black churches. (On the whole, this ordained United Methodist minister does a good job of hiding his cards, though certain mainline Protestant facial tics do occur whenever the topics of women's ordination or homosexuality come up.)

The surveys cover a lot of territory. Here are several findings I found interesting:



- Women comprise zero percent of Catholic clergy, one percent of evangelical clergy, three percent of historic black clergy, and twenty percent of mainline Protestant clergy.
- The Catholic church has the least number of clergy under age 45 (16 percent); evangelicals have the most (29 percent).
- Pentecostal and “Independent Protestant” congregations are the most likely to agree their pastor is a good match for the congregation, while Methodists and Presbyterian Reformed are the least likely.
- Mainline Protestant churches pay their pastors the most generous incomes in every category of church size, except for mega (1000+), for which no statistic is listed (?!).
- Catholic and historic black clergy average the most working hours a week (55 and 54 hours, respectively), while mainline and conservatives average the least (48 and 47 hours).
- Catholic clergy spend their largest segment of weekly time in “worship leadership (incl. preparation)” and administration—9 hours. Mainline, conservative, and black Protestant clergy spend their largest bulk in “preaching (incl. preparation)” —all three average 10 hours per week.
- Catholics, mainline Protestants, and historic black churches read what I would call the heavier stuff, while conservatives prefer the lighter stuff. Here are the three “most read” authors for each category:
  - Catholic—Henri J. M. Nouwen, John Paul II, Raymond Brown.
  - Mainline Protestant—Henri J. M. Nouwen, William Willimon, Frederick Buechner.
  - Historic black—Warren Wiersbe, John MacArthur, Matthew Henry.
  - And conservative Protestant—Max Lucado, John Maxwell, Charles Swindoll.
- Pastors of every age, every church size, every gender, and every denominational tradition ranked “preaching,” “teaching people about faith,” and “worship leadership” as what they did best.
- Mainline Protestant congregations ranked “conducting worship” as the most important thing pastors do, while conservative congregations pointed to “teaching about faith.”

Once again, all this is fascinating. Statistics, when they can be trusted, give us a glimpse into what people value, where their priorities lie, what they believe. Here are two more revealing examples:

- Two other surveys of how clergy spend their time, conducted in 1934 and 1954 among mainline Protestants, allow past clergy to be compared with present.
  - In 1934, the average mainline Protestant clergyman spent 22.5 hours per week on sermon preparation and delivery.
  - In 1954, he spent 8.5 hours.
  - In 2001, he or she spent 10.3 hours.

What’s ministerial time being devoted to instead? Nothing, apparently.

- In 1934, the average clergy worked 75.7 hours per week total.
- In 1954, the figure dropped to 66.7 hours total.
- In 2001, 50.8 hours total.

Are pastors today lazier? Carroll says they are “more balanced.” (We do need to be careful drawing strong conclusions from statistics of this kind in that social pressures of the 1930s and 50s would have been very different, potentially prompting pastors to count different things as work that pastors don’t today.)

- Pastors were asked whether, when deciding on a new program or ministry, they would more likely consider the “theological rationale” for the change or “how well it meets the desires and needs of members or prospective members.” Carroll reports that only 27 percent would give priority to the theological rationale, while 73 percent would give priority to how well member needs and desires were met. Moreover, differences between denominational traditions were not statistically significant, except for mainline Protestants who were “somewhat less likely” than others to consider a theological rationale. Nor were there significant differences when comparisons were made for church size, the pastor’s education level, or leadership style.

## FROM THE STATISTICAL TO THE THEOLOGICAL

Since the results of these surveys appear to have provided the occasion for writing this book, most of my comments will respond to these. Yet we need to glance at least cursorily at the book’s larger storyline. The data are reported in chapters 3 to 6. On either side of these central chapters, Carroll devotes the opening and the closing chapters (1-2 and 7-8) to defining what a minister is, and what constitutes an excellent ministry. When this entire sandwich is considered together, the book begins to feel like Robert Putnam meeting George Lindbeck or Stanley Hauerwas.

### *Producers of Culture*

Like Lindbeck or Hauerwas, Carroll describes the work and life of the church entirely in the language of cultural sociology, and a sociology in which moral and spiritual authority rests in a substantial way—I think (Carroll does not show us all his theological cards)—with the community. Ministers are the “culture producers”—God’s potters. They produce or give shape to the culture. They don’t do such work alone; they work with the members of the congregation, called “meaning makers.” And all

of them together “create meaning” out of the various “cultural objects” the church has been given, objects like the Bible or hymns or other church traditions. Moreover, each church creates meaning within their particular “social world.”

The idea of ministers as “potters” does have a biblical aura. Carroll draws it from the apostle Paul’s reference to having treasure in “clay jars so that it may be clear that the extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us” (2 Cor. 4:7). Yet he has to make two inferential leaps to get where he wants to go: from the apostle as clay jar to congregation as clay jar; and from congregation as clay jar to ministers as potters.

Now a writer is not bound to use an explicitly scriptural metaphor—like shepherd—for describing the work of ministers. And Scripture uses a number of metaphors to describe a minister’s work because so much is involved in his work—prophetic aspects, ruling aspects, mediating aspects, and so forth. From the standpoint of a biblical worldview, however, the choice of “potter” does strike me as strange. In doing theology, giving primacy to a secondary or, as here, an inferential metaphor often distorts Scripture’s intended meaning. Classic liberals do this, for instance, with theories of the atonement. Open theists do this with the doctrine of God’s knowledge. In both cases proof texts are overemphasized or over-inference-ized and the forest is lost for the trees. When it comes to the Bible’s theology of leadership, perhaps it’s not incidental that someone who gives primacy to the work of leaders and churches as “creating meaning” out of “cultural objects” like the Bible should choose a metaphor that the authors of Scripture, interestingly, reserve for God himself (Gen. 2:7; Job 10:9; Is. 29:16; Jer. 18:6; Rom. 9:21), which is not true of other metaphors for leadership (again, like shepherd). Is God not the true potter and culture shaper? Biblically, one *could* say that ministry is culture-shaping, but only as quickly as one would say that an ambassador’s work is culture-shaping—it’s true, but it misses the main point. The point is representing someone else, and delivering someone else’s message (see 2 Cor. 5:20). The ambassador who grows tired of his charge to deliver a message, and who begins to fancy himself as a “Shaper of Culture,” I fear, is an ambassador who will soon distort the message and manipulate opportunities for his own gain. So too with every minister who does not recognize that his ministry is stewardship, his authority representative, his message not his own, and his life mediatorial (see 2 Cor. 4:2). This is not to deny the unique ways God may gift a certain man “to bring to the table” his own personality and gifts in a particular context; it’s simply an attempt to place our emphases in the right places. Distorted emphases lead to distorted and manipulative ministries.

### **Producers of High Culture**

With these sociological (communitarian? postliberal?) definitions set in place in chapters 1 and 2, Carroll then re-employs them in the final chapters on ministerial excellence (7 and 8). What is an excellent ministry? It’s ministry that produces not just culture, but which reproduces “high culture,” a corporate life that will be defined variously between Catholics and Protestants, mainline and conservative, white and black. In other words, each tradition has a way of interpreting the Bible and church tradition in order to yield its conceptions of excellent ministry practices. Excellent ministry is then ministry that reproduces these excellent practices.

Commendably, Carroll sets out to avoid measuring excellence in ministry by the values of the business world, values like growth, hard work, efficiency, avoidance of weakness, and so forth. The high culture of a Christian church should be much more “cruciform,” he says, that is, more dedicated to showing God’s power in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus through the church’s vulnerability, service, hope-giving message, and love. In the end, however, it’s difficult to see how Carroll’s “strategies for excellence” would not be satisfying to the business world:

- “recruit for excellence” by creating a culture of call in churches;
- “educate for excellence” by encouraging more study and continued study among ministers;
- “congregationally and denominationally support excellence” by paying ministers more;
- and “taking responsibility for excellence” among ministers themselves by practicing spiritual disciplines, developing their imagination, nurturing holy friendships, maintaining boundaries between work and family life, and being diligent in caring for their own physical and emotional well-being.

In short, Carroll calls churches and ministers to recruit better, educate better, pay better, and self-motivate better.

### **FROM SOCIOLOGY TO SUI GENERIS**

If I were reviewing Carroll’s book as a pure secularist, I might try to deconstruct the argument by exposing the tension between the postmodern and modern—between the epistemic priority given first to the community’s high culture and then to statistics.

If I were reviewing Carroll’s book as a businessman, I might try to demonstrate that, in the end, his solutions are just as pragmatic as what I might find in any business journal.

If I were reviewing Carroll’s book as theologian, I might want to have a discussion about defining ministerial excellence according to high culture instead of Scripture, as well as about letting one’s sociology shape one’s hermeneutic *more* than having Scripture shape one’s hermeneutic and sociology.

Yet I want to go in a related, but slightly different direction: what should a minister make of all these statistics? After all, it’s the *P&P* project which prompted the book in the first place. What should pastors and church leaders take from all these surveys, or the surveys of George Barna, Thom Rainer, or others?

### **Why Statistics Are Useful**

Statistics have a way of making abstract claims concrete, of reinforcing convictions, or of undermining long-held assumptions. In that regard, statistics are very useful. Conservatives claim to believe in the authority and sufficiency of God's Word. So why do they spend no more time preparing their sermons than mainline Protestants? If they really believe the Bible, why don't they spend more time studying it?

Most ministers probably believe they work hard. Do they? Compared to ministers in 1934?

We could keep going, but the point should be clear. Like balancing the checkbook, hard numbers can quickly expose habits, values, and decision-making patterns that are taken for granted. Do you consider yourself a generous person? What would your bank statement say?

### **Why Statistics Can Be Misleading**

But surely the utility of numbers is limited at best, deceiving at worst. Does a large church mean that the preaching has been sound...or entertaining? Does less time in the study in preparation for a sermon mean less care for Scripture...or more time stuck in a daily commute...or longer hours on the knees praying? Who knows! The real issue, and the reason I'm always surprised to find books in the "church" section reading like books in the political science section, is this: how can we quantify the movement of the supernatural? How accurately can we really evaluate those things which the Bible assures us can only be seen with eyes of faith? How well can we discern what's in the mind of God?

An analogy here might be useful, one that occurred to me while reading Mark Thompson's recent monograph on the clarity of Scripture. Thompson observes that many writers approach the interpretation of Scripture like they approach the interpretation of any other text, submitting the biblical text to ordinary rules of grammar, genre, structure, syntax, and literary devices. In so far as Scripture has been written by men, this is entirely appropriate and yields valuable fruit. But for those who also affirm that Scripture has been written by God, such tools are finally not enough.

The relationship between author and text is not the same as in other texts. The relationship between author and reader (any reader) is different in the case of the Bible to any other text. In other words, the *sui generis* character of this text needs to be respected...There is much to appreciate in the way in which Scripture has been constructed as literature. Yet neither historical nor literary analysis is sufficient when it comes to the stuff of the Bible...Christian engagement with the Bible cannot forget, ignore, or suspend for the sake of some higher goal, the identification of this text as the written word of God (*A Clear and Present Word*, 135-36).

I had to look up *sui generis* in the dictionary when I read it. It means "constituting a class alone: unique, peculiar." Now, the church on earth offers nothing as infallible or authoritative as the word of God. Yet among the organizations that fall within Robert Putnam's research bailiwick, surely, Christians would affirm that the church constitutes a class alone. God has not elected the Boy Scouts. Christ did not die for a Masonic Lodge. The Holy Spirit does not regenerate and sanctify bowling leagues (at least in their capacity as bowling leagues).

In other words, the very things that give life and breath to the church cannot be seen or measured.

A hundred Boy Scouts can meet in a room, as can a hundred Masons, as can a hundred Muslims, as can a hundred people calling themselves "Christian." What's the difference between these groups of people? Statistically, nothing. What's the difference between them spiritually? Hopefully, everything. But spiritual differences can only be seen with spiritual eyes. They cannot be surveyed with the kinds of questions human beings are capable of answering by checking a box, unless of course ministers and churches could answer questions like these:

- What percentage of the conversions in your church over the last year were genuine?
- What percentage of the people singing on Sunday were praising God in their hearts, and what percentage were playing along?
- Is the recent numerical growth in your church a sign of God's blessing and favor or merely the effectiveness of worldly devices? Is God behind it or not?
- Is the recent lack of numerical growth in your church a result of (i) dated evangelistic methods, (ii) God's decision in eternity past to close the doors of your church and give the city in which you presently live over to its sin, or (iii) God's decision in eternity past to teach your church to faithfully persevere in the midst of opposition for several years before blessing it with visible fruit?
- If you answered (iii) to the question above, then how many years does God intend for your church to persevere before it will witness outward fruit?

Our imaginary survey could go on for pages. I hope the reader gets the point. Statistics can be useful for churches. But the most important things about a church cannot be measured by the devices of sociology or statistics. And here I'm talking about the differences between fake and real, between flesh and spirit, between the minds of men and the mind of God.

How then should we measure excellence in ministers and churches? We should measure them entirely according to whether they are faithful to living by and proclaiming God's Word. That's the measurement Paul uses in his chapter on clay jars.

Have you taken the apostle's survey found in 2 Corinthians 4? Take a moment now to fill out it out:

- Have you renounced secret and shameful ways or used deception in the work of the ministry (2 Cor. 4:2)?
- Have you distorted the word of God *or* have you set forth the truth of God plainly, commending yourself to every man's conscience in the sight of God (2 Cor. 4:2)? Remember that "the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). Human devices and standards of excellence will prove futile!
- Do you preach yourself or Christ Jesus as Lord and yourself as servants for Jesus' sake (2 Cor. 4:5)?
- Would your fellow staff and members of your church be more likely to say, "He's impressive!" or "He's nothing more than a clay jar, but God sure seems to use him!" In other words, is your ministry marked by the display of human excellence, or by the display of an "all-surpassing divine power" amidst your weakness, your affliction, your being perplexed, your persecution, your being struck down, your carrying around in your body the death of Jesus with the foolish message of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:7-10; 1 Cor. 1:17-19)?

May God indeed grant you and me the cruciform humility to pursue such "excellent" ministries!

[1] See Jonathan Cohn, "Irrational Exhuberance," *The New Republic*, Oct. 25, 1999: 25-31.

*Jonathan Leeman is the director of communications for 9Marks.*

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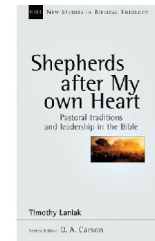
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***Shepherds After My Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*** by Timothy S. Laniak

IVP (in the *New Studies in Biblical Theology* series, ed. D. A. Carson), 2006, 313pp

Reviewed by Jonathan Leeman



Good biblical theologies like Timothy Laniak's *Shepherds After My Heart* make me want to know my Bible better. Reading them is like learning something significant about an old friend: "I never put those pieces together about you. But now it makes sense. Wow!"

What prompted his study, Laniak says in sentence one of the book, is the dizzying pace at which books on leadership are being published these days. He wondered if the Bible has anything to say about the topic. Good question.

And answering it requires more than a concordance and a word search for "shepherd." Biblical theologies look for overarching themes and typological structures rooted in the narrative of the entire canon. The "shepherd" metaphor only occurs several times in the Pentateuch. But with the help of later writers we discover that God uses the wilderness narratives to fill out what a shepherd is: "You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (Ps. 77:20). Statements like these (and many others) allow the reader to understand that what Moses did in the wilderness was the work of a shepherd. Later Scripture helps to interpret earlier Scripture.

Let me say right off the bat, then, what's remarkable about *Shepherds After My Own Heart* is that it demonstrates how important the shepherding metaphor is in the Bible. I don't think I'm overstating the matter by suggesting that it's one of the main characters in the Bible's storyline, or a girder beam that helps hold it all together. It's as if my wife wrote an autobiography after I died about our lives together. No matter how much or how little she used the words "marriage" or "wife" or "husband," the reader would know that even the occasional use of such words pointed to the internal structure of our lives together. Everything that I did in relation to my wife would fill out what it meant for me to have been a husband. Likewise, Laniak moves from genre to genre through the course of redemption history to show how God relates to his people by dwelling with them, by protecting them, by feeding them, by ruling over them, and by guiding them. God relates to his people as a shepherd, a multi-faceted metaphor that wonderfully captures many aspects of God's relationship to his people. Not only that, Laniak shows how Scripture reveals a "divine preference for human agency" (248) as God calls his undershepherds to represent his own rule and care over the flock.

## OUTLINE

The book is explicitly aimed at academics and "thoughtful pastors." It's a shame, of course, that Laniak implies by this that a category even exists for *thoughtless* pastors. Nonetheless, his stated intent probably makes sense in light of what's on pastor bestseller lists. The book doesn't read like John Maxwell. It reads like a footnote-packed, bibliographically-intense dissertation. Chapter 1 is an erudite discussion of what metaphors are—"systems of associated commonplaces" (!). Chapters 2 and 3 explore how this particular system of associated commonplaces would have been understood in the ancient Near East, as well as how it was used to characterize Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Greek gods and kings.

The Bible study begins in chapter 4, where God's own pastoral and protective work of leading a people through the wilderness is described and then embodied in the archetypal shepherd, Moses. It continues in chapter 5, where God's own pastoral work of ruling is described and then embodied in a second archetypal shepherd, David.

Laniak next traces the metaphor into the prophetic tradition, taking time to explore the more significant passages in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. (Commentary provided by the Psalms is interspersed through the entire book.) He then moves to the four Gospels and a certain Good Shepherd who fulfills both the Mosaic and Davidic archetypes as the Shepherd King and who leads his flock through the wilderness of a second exodus.

The Bible study ends by tracing the metaphor into 1 Peter and Revelation (he skips Paul, interestingly, because "Although Paul is quite 'pastoral' in his ministry, engages second exodus theology at times...and refers to church leaders as shepherds occasionally, pastoral imagery is not a central, organizing rubric in the Pauline corpus"; 25, n.7). After briefly exploring God's tabernacling presence in the new Jerusalem, where God and the Lamb dwell directly with the people, Laniak concludes his study of Scripture with this fascinating observation, drawing together the Mosaic-wilderness stream and the Davidic-royal stream:

Here is one of the rich ironies in the history of salvation: the heavenly Jerusalem, it turns out, was all along as much anticipated by the deserts and dispersions of the community's journey as by the earthly city bearing its name. In both experiences the Shepherd-Lamb was teaching them to follow him to their real home (245).

Do you see what I mean by calling the metaphor a girder beam? Wow.

The book concludes with several overarching reflections and an epilogue, which I'll return to in a moment.

## CRITIQUE

Perhaps if I had a Ph.D. in biblical studies, I could offer a response at the level at which the book is written. In other words, maybe if I was a Tom Schreiner or a Kevin McFadden I would have observed some exegetical oversight or canonical foul play. I'm not, and I didn't.

So let me be slightly uncharitable and critique the author for failing to do something he never intended to do, particularly since he's fulfilling the criteria of both his guild and, what's more, the series in which his book is published (a favorite of mine). I can't help but express a modicum of sadness that the book didn't offer a little more application for the pastor today as well as doxology. No, the book doesn't mean to provide either. Yet may I, simply as a Christian, have a moment to wax lugubrious? Whatever happened to the days of Calvin's *Institutes* and *Commentaries* when exegesis, systematic, and praise coincided? When a Bible scholar could point, postulate, and praise in the same moment? When the professor didn't simply hand the results of his dispassionate research to the preacher to dumb down, dilute, and distort, but the professor and preacher were the same man? As Laniak worked his way through such amazing texts and such wonderful truths, part of me wanted to say to him, "Preach it, brother!" Another part of me wanted to shout out in song!

Okay, thank you for my moment. I expect it's not even Laniak's fault. Back to the review. The book is excellent, and should be read by every thoughtful and thoughtless pastor, both so that they might better understand the word, and so that they might better understand their own role. (I have heard that Laniak has a follow-up volume in the works that brings much of the exegetical fruit of this work to bear on the ministry of the local church, which will be titled, "While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks.")

## MEDITATION

As I said, the book concludes with seven very helpful comprehensive observations. First, shepherd leadership is comprehensive in its scope. It's a metaphor that captures a number of roles—protector, provider, and guide—which is why it's variously used of prophets, priests, and kings. Pastors are generalists that need to know how to respond to a diversity of problems and opportunities in their particular context. Along these lines, good shepherding calls for *the benevolent use of authority*: some occasions call for militant protection; other occasions call for gentle care. A man needs to know how to do both.

Second, bad shepherds forget whose flock they serve. Like the hired hand in Jesus' parable, they care only for themselves (John 10:13).

Third, the Scriptures present a divine preference for human agency, as we have already mentioned. Remarkably, God enlists humans created in his image to exercise his royal rule and authority, a representation that's made even more pointed and prominent in pastors. Recapturing a sense of awe over this fact may just help some thoughtless pastors become more thoughtful.

Fourth, a theology of leadership in the Bible "can only be understood in terms of a fully integrated theological vision of God and his work on earth." It requires an understanding of Christology and soteriology, ecclesiology and anthropology. It would be easy to condemn ourselves for failing to have done this in our leadership. But I hope Laniak's challenge here excites us instead to think through all the exciting possibilities for understanding leadership more deeply and theologically.

Fifth, the metaphor of shepherd is part of a larger historical redemptive narrative, as we have already mentioned.

Sixth, Scripture uses other metaphors for the work of ministers. The shepherding metaphor does not exhaust the possibilities of what a minister is and does.

Seventh, the image of shepherd points to the Bible's predilection for ordinary images as revelatory vehicles.

This last point leads into Laniak's initially shocking one-page epilogue. Since the Bible demonstrates a predilection for common, ordinary images, he argues that our responsibility in the church today is to find "dynamic equivalents" which communicate to congregations what the "system of associated commonplaces" that "shepherd" would have communicated to our biblical forbearers. CEO, perhaps? Or coach? Laniak concedes that he cannot think of a metaphor that overlaps perfectly with the "multivalent" biblical metaphor of shepherd, so a mix of metaphors will probably be necessary. The apostle Paul, he proposes, understood this lesson quite well. Paul seldom used the image of shepherd to describe ideal leadership, but a multiplicity of metaphors, all of which relate what a leader should be—slave, friend, midwife, father, ambassador, and overseer.

So what do we think of this proposal? Is Laniak undermining his 250 pages of careful exegesis in a couple of paragraphs? It's tempting to dismiss the proposal on theological principles, as if he were undermining the authority and sufficiency of God's word. Yet I'm not so sure. I don't think this is a conversation about philosophies of Bible translation or radical contextualization. I think his remarks are more akin to a conversation about applying a sermon. Any time a preacher reads a passage of Scripture, and then says something like, "The author's point here is kind of like the time when..." or "How does the biblical author's meaning relate to us today?" In this sense, I'm moderately sympathetic with Laniak's proposal.

Having said that, I will comment on a more pragmatic note, I don't know that the idea of shepherding is that foreign to us. I've never done a survey, but are people today that unclear about what a shepherd does? And to the extent they are unclear, would it take that much work to fill out their understanding? Perhaps the image lacks the emotional resonance it would have had for a people in an agrarian culture. Maybe that's why Paul didn't use it very often with his urban audiences. I'm not sure.

In the final analysis, however, I believe that we can have absolute confidence in the clarity and sufficiency of God's Word as it stands. Were more pastors to ambitiously pursue their jobs and lives as God's call to feed...to gather...to protect...to guide...to know...*His* flock...at the cost of their own lives...and to throw off metaphors like CEO, comedian, entertainer, pollster, our churches would look very different. Laniak helps us to recapture such a vision.

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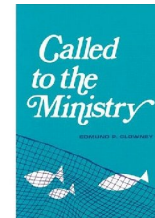
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## **Book Review: *Called to the Ministry* By Edmund P. Clowney**

Presbyterian & Reformed, 1964, 90 pp, \$4.00

*Reviewed by Ken Barbic*

Public invitations. Emotionally charged pleas. Calls to use one's life for the highest possible purpose. Warm, fuzzy feelings and inner inclinations. Are these the things that come to mind when you consider calling to the Christian ministry?



Maybe you enjoy your present opportunities to serve in your church. You've seen some fruit come of it. And you enjoy studying Scripture. Add to these desires the fact that your current employment may feel less than satisfying. Are you called to leave the "secular realm" and pursue "vocational ministry"? I pose this scenario not as a disengaged observer, but as a young man grappling with these very questions.

For these reasons, I want to call Edmund Clowney's book *Called to the Ministry* to your attention, and to work through how this book has impacted my own thinking on this issue. Clowney considers larger issues of guidance and decision making to the realm of vocational Christian ministry, and he does so in a succinct but powerful manner.

Ministry is not the solution to personal identity crisis

My own tendency is to approach the question of calling by asking what kind of work will satisfy and fulfill me. Since approaches like mine are probably common in today's world, Clowney helpfully begins by addressing the issue of personal identity in relation to vocation. Our identity and fulfillment in life is not primarily a function of the particular career we choose, the relationships we have, or the status we attain. Our identity and therefore every question of guidance must flow out of who we are in Jesus Christ.

This particular point has impacted my thinking more than anything else Clowney says. Many people in the world today seek to overcome their sense of alienation and lack of identity in vocation; Clowney points them to Jesus instead. We cannot properly begin addressing the question of calling until we first address, "Who am I?", and find the answer in Christ.

### **ERRORS IN CALLING**

Clowney makes his case with both positive and negative illustrations of what the calling to ministry entails and how it's pursued. What are some of the errors Christians tend to believe about calling?

#### ***God's call should not be confused with specific decisions.***

Since God has clearly and specifically revealed "who I am in Christ," our thinking about the call must begin here, and not with specific decisions about what job to take or what person to marry. Clowney says, "there is no call to the ministry that is not first a call to Christ" (5). In other words, the Bible plainly reveals the fact that we who are Christians are "in Christ," and this has implications for how we live our lives and make our decisions. So start here.

#### ***God's call should not be confused with the idea that I get one opportunity to "make the right decision."***

The idea that I need to rightly discern exactly what God might be telling me about a particular decision I have to make, and that there is only "one right answer" to any given decision, is a greater burden than any finite creature can bear. This tendency is exacerbated by a modern consumer culture that says my happiness, well-being, and success is largely contingent on marketplace decisions. But God's Word promises "blessing" for those who seek after God's revealed righteousness and obey it (Ps. 1; Jer. 17; Matt. 5), not for those who expertly adjudicate their decisions in the arena of presently unrevealed potentialities.

#### ***God's call should not be confused with a proper technique for yielding right answers.***

I often fall into the trap of thinking that if I simply garner all the facts about a situation, talk to a "multitude of counselors," and apply appropriate biblical wisdom to a decision, then the process will yield the right answer. In other words, I am often tempted to use a biblical approach to guidance as my own Urim and Thummim (see 1 Sam. 14:41).

#### ***God's call does not mean the "process" is unimportant***

While we often think of getting the right answer to every decision as the ultimate goal, God does much of his work in the process of decision-making. In all of life's decisions, we cannot expect a guided tour: "where next, God?" Often we want the



guided tour because it seems like it will grant us the greatest level of personal success and comfort. However, this approach forgets the fact that our Sovereign Lord has not only redeemed our souls, he is working to use our often short-sighted and ill-informed decisions to conform us more and more to his image. In other words, God has something far greater in mind than just making sure “we get it right” on every decision in our lives. He’s teaching us to delight less and less in our own wisdom and glory and more and more in his.

## **MINISTRY IS THE PRESENT CALLING OF EVERY CHRISTIAN**

It is my tendency, and maybe yours, to think of calling to ministry as a future event. This idea could not be further from the biblical truth. The calling to serve the church, to love God, and to love my neighbor are all callings to ministry that should be present realities, not merely future dreams. The calling to vocational ministry takes place within a context of service.

Clowney makes several excellent statements regarding the exercise, development, and confirmation of gifts in present situations:

Your sphere of action, your ministry in the service of Christ, is marked out by the gifts Christ has given you. The gifts of Christ’s grace are like a majestic stained-glass window in his church. Each Christian is set in place like a piece of jeweled glass, so that the radiance of God’s grace may shine through him to add a beam of crimson or emerald or azure to the orchestration of color blazing within (28-29).

You may need rather different Christian friends besides those you have cultivated...There is a disturbing possibility that you may need most the spiritual gifts of Christians least like yourself in age, social background, race—even denominational affiliation (33).

What opportunities do you perceive? The first doors are in the room where you are. The Lord has given you a certain set of present circumstances. Paul refers to this as a man’s “calling”...Here you must begin; indeed, here you must be willing to remain until other doors of opportunity are perceived and opened. The surest way to miss future opportunities is to ignore present ones (37-38).

The present calling to service is not only more important than a specific calling to vocational ministry, it is also a prerequisite. So in the midst of my own daydreaming and fantasizing about what the future may hold, I must recognize that these are truly vain thoughts if they are not firmly rooted in present acts of faithfulness. As I have often heard my own pastor say, “When people come to me and tell me that they are called to missions work overseas, I often ask them what they are doing to evangelize at their present place of work or in their neighborhood.” So too with someone claiming to be called to the pastorate. The friends around him should ask, “How are you stewarding opportunities to teach, disciple, encourage, exhort, evangelize others today?”

## **“THE CALL”**

So what is the call to ministry? It’s a combination of factors and events. It requires certain qualifications and certain gifts. It requires an internal desire and an external verification. It is not developed merely in the vacuum of personal devotion, but in the context of the larger church body. It is not an instantaneous moment, but a process. Because it is a process, it can transpire in different ways for different people. For some, the call is clearly desired and then verified and confirmed over time. For others, the desire is less clearly defined; but through persistent acts of service and faithfulness, it’s externally validated while the desire continues to develop.

I have seen the Lord take people who were employed successfully as scholars, lawyers, congressional staff members, and businessmen and call them into vocational ministry. I have seen other people that desired nothing but vocational ministry from the time they began considering their life’s vocation. I have known still others that seem to possess some level of gifting for vocational ministry, yet remain successfully employed in other types of work. What is the common thread that runs through each of these lives? Each of these individuals, to my knowledge, is seeking full gospel-dependability in their present situation.

Calling is firstly a question of identity and present responsibility. Calling is secondarily a question of future position, which is often revealed as a result of properly understanding the first matters.

## **CONCLUSION**

So where did this book leave me in my search to answer the question, “Am I called to the ministry?”

\*I must daily put on the mind of Christ. I must study Scripture prayerfully, in faith that the Holy Spirit will develop the mind of Christ in me.

\*I must pursue the qualities of 1 Timothy 3—regardless of whether I ever become a pastor.

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\*Do I desire the office of overseer/elder? I need to express my desires and perceived gifts to the elders and my church for examination. This might sound arrogant at first, but opening yourself up for personal scrutiny actually takes humility.

\*If I intend to serve as an elder, I need to make vocational choices while thinking about what will allow me to best serve the church and others.

\*I need to recognize that it is okay to be fruitful in ministry, able to teach and edify others spiritually, but not be called to vocational ministry. I don't need to feel guilty if I have not been given the desire to pastor.

\*Do I view vocational ministry as a solution to current vocational struggles? I must realize that in vocational ministry my sin nature and my co-workers' sinful natures will still be present.

In short, I concluded this book in the same position I began, with no clearly defined “roadmap” for the future. Instead, I have been given the compass of Scripture by which I am called to continually recalibrate my life's direction this day. I have been given a firmly established identity that is not slavishly contingent on possession or position. I may not know the various terrains that await me along the journey, but I know the direction and I know the destination. Whether that means I will fill a pulpit one day, or simply continue to strive to be a fruitful member of a local church and a diligent employee in my place of vocation, I am confident that God will not waste the life of this one he has died for and that the path he has for me will surely and safely lead me home!

#### **Additional resources**

- Entrust Seminar audio: <http://www.covlife.org/entrust/>
- *Guidance and the Voice of God* by Tony J. Payne, Phillip D. Jensen, ~ Matthias Media January, 1997 ~ ISBN: 1875245669
- *Step by Step: Divine Guidance for Ordinary Christians* by James C. Petty ~ P & R Publishing July, 1999 ~ ISBN: 0875526039
- Guidance Core Seminar notes: [http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/CC\\_Content\\_Page/0,,PTID324006|CHID763014,00.html](http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/CC_Content_Page/0,,PTID324006|CHID763014,00.html)

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**Ninth Mark of Healthy Church *Member*—Follows Leadership**



## **By Thabiti Anyabwile**

The health of a local church may ride exclusively on the membership's response to the church's leadership. How the congregation receives or rejects its leaders has a direct effect on the possibilities of faithful ministry and church health. Does a congregation appreciate and accept sound preaching? Will they trust and follow a leader in difficult or unclear situations? Do they rally behind or tear apart the leadership when plans and ideas fail?

In the final analysis, church members are the people who generally make or break a local church. And making or breaking a church has a lot to do with the membership's attitudes and actions toward its leaders.

So, no serious attempt to define a healthy church member can neglect reflecting on the interaction between church members and church leaders. And not surprisingly, the inspired Word of God provides ample instruction regarding the *attitudes* and *actions* of church members who wish to contribute to the health of their local congregations by following the leadership of the church.

### **A HEALTHY CHURCH MEMBER'S ATTITUDE TOWARD LEADERSHIP**

At least three attitudes characterize healthy church members when it comes to following a local church's leaders.

#### **1. Honors the elders.**

Several passages of Scripture instruct church members to honor the elders and leaders of the congregation. For example, 1 Timothy 5:17 tells us, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching." What does such double honor include? The Apostle Paul brings attention to two things in the following verses. In verse 18, honoring the elders includes caring for their financial and physical needs. A congregation and a member that honor its leadership provide appropriate and sufficient wages for its leaders, particularly those whose full-time labor is ministry to the body.

In verse 19, the Apostle indicates that honoring our leaders includes protecting their reputations. We are not to "entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses." The Apostle understands better than anyone how the ministry is open to charges, criticisms, and complaints from outside and inside the church. A healthy church member helps shelter the shepherd from unwarranted slings and arrows. Rumors and backbitings die at the ears of a healthy church member who refuses to give consideration to unedifying and uncorroborated tales.

A healthy church member honors the elder's office. He or she esteems it highly, is thankful for it, and respects those who serve the Lord's people as elders. We honor our pastors because on the day of the Lord they shall be our boast (2 Cor. 1:14).

#### **2. "Opens heart" to the leaders.**

The honor and respect a church member gives an elder is not the distant and official honor a soldier gives a commanding officer. Coupled with the honor due a shepherd is an open hearted love. Repeatedly, Paul called the Corinthian church to open their hearts to him as one who cared for them spiritually.

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also (2 Cor. 6:11-13).

There should be a sweet exchange of affection between pastor and congregation. As they live, grow, and labor together, their hearts are to be increasingly opened wide each to the other. A healthy church member does not "withhold" his affection from the pastor; rather, he or she gives it freely and liberally.

A healthy church member doesn't want to hear his or her faithful pastor plead like the Apostle did with the Corinthians,

make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one. I do not say this to condemn you; I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you (2 Cor. 7:2-3).

A healthy member first gives himself to the Lord and then to the minister of the Lord, knowing that this is God's will (2 Cor. 8:5). Such a member sees how the faithful pastor will spend himself for the body in love. And they would be ashamed to hear the pastor ask, "If I love you more, will you love me less?" (2 Cor. 12:15). Unrequited love is fit for Shakespearean tragedy, not the local church. Our rejoicing in and love for our pastors should "refresh their hearts in the Lord" (Philem. 20).

#### **3. Is teachable.**

A healthy church member should also have a teachable spirit. A teachable spirit evidences humility of heart and desire to grow in Christ. Without it, a people grow stiff-necked and incorrigible.

The leader's job may be boiled down to one task: teaching. If a member or any significant portion of the membership proves unteachable, the shepherd's task becomes a burden, even undoable, since it's opposing him at this most essential point. Writing to Timothy, Paul provides wonderful instruction for pastors which contains within it good instruction for members as well. For the elder, Paul writes, "The Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful." Paul then continues,

Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

Several things are useful for church members to observe. First, the pastor's instruction is meant to be gentle, kind, and for our good. We should not take sinful advantage of that God-ordained disposition. Rather, we should accept that kind instruction as a rebuke and a call to repentance. A healthy church member doesn't mistake godly kindness for weakness in a pastor, but uses the occasion to examine his or her own heart for areas needing repentance. Second, we should recognize how easy it is to "oppose" the pastor as he instructs us. As a regular part of our spiritual life, we should ask ourselves, "Am I in any way opposing the teaching of the pastor?" Third, we should pray for knowledge of the truth, clear-mindedness, and protection from the devil's schemes whenever we discover even a kernel of opposition to pastoral instruction. The pastor watches over our soul as a man who must give an account to God; we should then trust and accept his leadership joyfully as a gift from God for our everlasting benefit. Be teachable.

## **A HEALTHY CHURCH MEMBER'S ACTIONS TOWARD LEADERSHIP**

In addition to these basic attitudes or dispositions, there are some specific actions a healthy church member will take in order to effectively follow the leadership of a local church.

### ***1. Patiently participates in the selection of leaders.***

Perhaps the most important decision a congregation makes—assuming a congregational polity—is the selection of its leaders. By choosing leaders, a congregation sets the spiritual tone and direction of the church, sometimes for generations. Perhaps this is why the apostles instructed the early church to look for spiritual qualities and maturity in its leaders (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3). Selecting a leader is to be done with patience and prayerful deliberation. "Lay hands on no man hastily" is the apostle's instruction to Timothy (1 Tim. 5:22a). The first deacons were to be "full of the Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3). Discerning these qualities requires prayer, observation, and patience. And if the Lord's church is to be healthy, church members must call and ordain leaders who are spiritually minded and mature in Christ.

Healthy church members do not overlook the importance of this essential task. They may invite the prospective leader and his family to lunch or dinner in order to know him better. They will want to hear more about the man's testimony, about his desire to serve in a leadership capacity, and about his previous ministry in churches. Some churches allow two months between a man's nomination for leadership and the actual vote in order for members to participate in precisely this way.

### ***2. Obeys and submits to leaders.***

Here's a good reason to prayerfully and patiently participate in the recognition of church leaders: a healthy church member must obey and submit to her or his leaders. "Obey" and "submit" are not only "bad words" at weddings, they're "bad words" to many church members. Yet the Bible couldn't be clearer: "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority" (Heb. 13:17). Our obedience is to make their work "a joy, not a burden." And our obedience redounds to our benefit, since it would "be of no advantage" for us to call men as leaders and then disobey them. A healthy church member orders himself under the leaders of the congregation as a soldier orders himself in the rank and file beneath a military general. We are to joyfully, eagerly, and completely submit to our leaders for our good, their good, and the good of the entire body.

### ***3. Follows the leaders' example.***

One reason the Lord appoints men to leadership in the church is to provide a flesh and blood example of faithful, godly living to the congregation. Our leaders are the "motion picture" of following Jesus. They are called to be an example in everything (1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Pet. 5:3). That's why the Apostle Paul says, "Join with others in following my example, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you" (Phil. 3:17). A healthy church member patterns his or her life after the godly lifestyle of the elders of the church. We are to follow their example with the expectation of conformity to Christ.

For many in our day, this very idea sounds cultish. There are too many personality cults where people parrot all that the celebrity pastor says or does. We're correct to be concerned with such an unbiblical notion of example setting and mentorship. Yet the Bible's picture of following the pastor's example points to genuine godliness in "speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in

purity" (1 Tim. 4:12) "by doing what is good" (Tit. 2:7). Pastors are called to be such models, and healthy church members wisely follow their pattern of holiness.

#### **4. Prays for leaders.**

Given all that church leaders must do and contend with, can you think of a more important thing to do than to pray for them? Even the Apostle Paul understood his need for the saints' faithful prayer:

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should (Col. 4:2-4; see also Eph. 6:19-20).

We should pray for our leaders' boldness, clarity, and consistency with the gospel message, and opportunity for them to proclaim Christ. Healthy church members are devoted to prayer on behalf of their leaders. They heed Jesus' exhortation to pray and not give up (Luke 18:1), and they do that on behalf of their shepherds.

In our local church, a faithful band of members meets every Tuesday night for the purpose of praying for leadership. Weekly they solicit prayer requests and updates on previous requests. When they meet, they lift up all kinds of prayers for the personal, public, and ministry lives of the elders. God has produced great fruit in our body through their prayers.

#### **5. Supports outside ministry and interaction of leaders.**

This is perhaps the least obvious of the actions that a healthy church member takes in following leadership. There is a great tendency among church members to be fairly possessive of their pastors—"he's our pastor." There are positive aspects to this possessiveness. It shows, for example, an open hearted attachment to the shepherds.

However, this possessiveness can become selfishness if the congregation refuses to support a pastor's involvement in ministry outside the local congregation. The persons most often hurt in such selfishness is the pastor himself, who, without outside stimulation and refreshment from fellow pastors and leaders, tends to dry and shrivel on the vine. A healthy church member contributes to the leaders' ongoing health and vigor in the ministry by encouraging participation in outside conferences, speaking opportunities, and fellowship with other church leaders.

The Bible provides ample illustration of one congregation's support of another. A local church's generosity to other churches is commended in 2 Corinthians 9:13. And such generosity, when it takes the form of "loaning" a shepherd in ministry to others, hopefully expands the regions in which the gospel is proclaimed (2 Cor. 10:15-16). A healthy church member wants to see the gospel advanced and wants to contribute to the health of other congregations if possible. Supporting a leader's outside ministry is one way to fulfill this desire.

## **CONCLUSION**

Leadership in the local church is established by God for the blessing of his people. However, for leadership to be effective, it needs to be encouraged and supported by the members of the church. Many faithful men have shipwrecked on the rocky shoals of incorrigible and resistant members. It ought not to be so among God's people. Rather, healthy members of a local church should strive and encourage others to strive to follow their leaders with wide open hearts, eager obedience, and joyful submission.

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## Disagreements and Differences Among Elders

*An Interview with Matt Schmucker*

9Marks executive director Matt Schmucker answers more practical questions about elder life, particularly about disputes and differences with other elders, and yellow flags about finding elders.

### ON DISPUTES WITH OTHER ELDERS

**9M:** *What do you do when you struggle to get along with a fellow elder?*

**MS:** First you have to distinguish whether these struggles are doctrinal or personal. Assuming the question is related to personal, I would pursue God in prayer to ward off Satan in the relationship. Insofar as Satan loves to divide, he often does it between two leaders. And he'll use whatever he can, even simple issues of personality.

Next, pursue the brother to build the relationship. Often, irritation arises out of ignorance. Work to know the brother, and remember that you often don't have all the facts.

Finally, be humble. Even if, in the end, you don't understand why a person is the way he is, God has tolerated far more from you. Also, you can trust that God has given that man to the body, with his particular combination of strengths and weaknesses, to build up the body in ways that you cannot. Study the body passages in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and elsewhere, and know that God intends good through such differences, even though, in our fallen state, those differences may involve a lack of camaraderie.

**9M:** *Have you ever struggled to get along with another elder?*

**MS:** Yes.

**9M:** *Umm, anything else on that?*

**MS:** Over the years, I've had to practice the very things I listed above. Far more is at stake than my own personal likes, dislikes, and unsanctified turf-wars. The health of the church is at stake, which means that the glory of God itself is at stake (from a human responsibility standpoint).

Often, the personal struggle with another elder can arise as a result of an elder rejecting your ideas at the table. So it's been important for me to separate my ideas from my identity (which is justified in Christ!). Thus a rejection of my ideas is not a rejection of me. Along these lines, developing personal relationships outside of the elders meetings makes the work of eldering easier to do.

**9M:** *With thirteen elders at your church, how do you find time to care for these particular relationships?*

**MS:** It's difficult to do in a growing church and a busy city. Yet at the beginning of every meeting we shepherd each other before we shepherd the church. We do this by sharing concerns, confessing, praising, and then praying for one another. Basically, we let one another know what's going on in our lives. We can take up to an hour of the elder's meeting to do this. Beyond this, we try to meet together individually for lunches and dinners from time to time.

### ON DIFFERENCES WITH OTHER ELDERS

**9M:** *Let's move to differences of principles. How do you as an elder know when to back off from pressing your conviction and when to hold your ground?*

**MS:** The clearer it is in Scripture, the firmer you hold your ground. On the one hand, I'm not going to yield on the deity of Christ, even if the other twelve elders do. On the other hand, I personally have strong convictions about birth control that are not obvious and clear in Scripture; and these convictions are not shared by all of my fellow elders. On this issue, therefore, I tread more lightly. A situation involving the question of birth control actually came up a while back. I vigorously argued my position biblically and practically. Yet then I had to submit—joyfully!—to the other elders who may have been sympathetic to my position but finally voted otherwise.

Recently, I returned to the elders from a sabbatical and was asked what I learned during the break. I realized that the church continued to prosper without my active involvement and opinions as an elder. This caused in me a healthy realization that I should hold my opinions more lightly.

### UNITY AND MATURITY

**9M:** *Given the importance of unity and maturity among the elders, what are some traits or characteristics of potential elders that ought to raise yellow flags?*

**MS:** I think there are a bunch of obvious ones: volatility, instability, bad reputation in the community, unruly children, and so on.

So let me point to several less obvious yellow flags. One less obvious one would be that of a contrarian spirit. You know the sort of guy I mean. If you say “black,” he’ll say “white.” No matter what you say, that’s what you get. The spirit that is perpetually looking for the “on the other hand” or waiting for “the other shoe to drop” is not helpful in building up the church. In Acts 6, for instance, Paul instructs the church to appoint deacons not only for their proficiencies, but because these men will bring unity between the Greek-speaking and the Hebrew-speaking widows. How much more should an elder be someone who builds unity and works to resolve rather than to merely offer up an opposing opinion?!

Another yellow flag that is commonly overlooked is the question of a man’s spiritual fruit in the lives of those around him. To put it positively, this is what drew our attention in 1998, for instance, to a church member named Andy Johnson. He had been quietly discipling other single men on a consistent basis, resulting in real spiritual progress in their lives. To put it negatively, then, no spiritual fruit is a yellow flag, even if the world would recognize the man as being “successful.”

Finally, an unsupportive wife is a yellow flag. Eldering done right is a demanding task. It takes time to pray. It takes time to prepare to teach. It takes time to disciple. It takes time to give hospitality. All of these impact the home, and places certain demands on a wife. How does she feel about doing hospitality? How does she feel about losing her husband every other Thursday night to an elders meeting? Does she welcome the unexpected visitor at the door who’s in need?

**9M:** *What positive qualities would you want to emphasize in looking for elders?*

**MS:** Too often we look toward worldly success to measure a man. We must teach our churches to look for men of the Word—to measure men based on their knowledge of, their submission to, and their ability to proclaim God’s Word. I like what Mark Dever says: an elder’s “ability to teach” means that when wolves come near the flock, the sheep know that they can trust this shepherd to expose the wolf and, in turn, to protect them. That’s the elder’s great calling.

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## Elders Roundtable

We asked all the non-staff elders of Capitol Hill Baptist Church,

**“Thinking back to when you first became an elder, what initial lesson(s) most stand out in equipping you to elder well?”**



Here are their answers.

### **Randy Alles** (*Officer, U.S. Marine Corps*)

Elders in the New Testament are called to pastor and to teach those in the church, which will equip the saints to build up the body of Christ (Eph 4:11, 1 Tim 3:2). These are key responsibilities often overlooked in the day to day grind of operating a church but to me are of utmost importance. Pastoring and teaching enables church members to develop a maturity in the Lord so they are less vulnerable to strange doctrines, the trickery of men, and deceit. All of this brings glory to the Lord and benefits the believer.

### **Bill Behrens** (*Special Advisor for Commercial and Business Affairs, State Department*)

What has most prepared equipped me to serve this congregation as an elder is the congregation itself. It is here that many humble saints cared for me and modeled Christ, where I sat under great teaching, where I was first disciplined, and had the opportunity to serve and teach others.

### **Steve Boyer** (*Controller, Salvation Army*)

The importance of prayer stood out to me early after becoming an elder. The responsibility to care for so many members impressed upon me my utter dependence on God. Beginning our elder meetings with a healthy time of prayer reminded me that elders are to be devoted to praising God, inquiring of God, confessing to God, thanking God, and pleading to God in prayer according to His will. Then watching for how God fulfills his promises in the lives of members of the church by sanctifying us is one of my most treasured joys, as I see the Holy Spirit tangibly working in our lives.

### **Chris Bruce** (*Business writer, Bureau of National Affairs*)

What stood out most was understanding, and then verifying by experience, the importance of beginning meetings with an extended period of prayer. That gave us the kind of unity we needed, set the right tone for what could be a long night, and provided a good perspective for the inevitable disagreements. Every so often we decided we "didn't have time" to begin with prayer, and in each case our work suffered for it and we came to regret that decision.

### **Jamie Dunlop** (*Research Director, Corporate Executive Board*)

1. The importance of a regular ministry of prayer on behalf of those in our church who are hurting. 2. Learning from other elders the art of asking kind, gentle questions. 3. The importance of listening well to other elders, recognizing that many situations are not as they appear. 4. Recognizing that all Christians (even elders) struggle and are in constant need of encouragement (Heb 3:13). 5. The usefulness of advance planning of one's calendar—being strategic with people outside of regular discipling relationships. 6. Knowing that no elder is "up to the task" of eldering. We're all acting in weakness and without sufficient wisdom, depending through prayer on God to accomplish his work through us.

### **Brian Fajito** (*Co-founder, Manas Development Group*)

First Peter 5:2-3 for me was a recurring lesson. God in his grace has called us as elders to be shepherds of *his* flock (not ours). We're called to lead in humility and to serve as examples. If we are to serve well as elders, we need to continually remind ourselves that there is no place for pride in light of the cross of Christ, and we must heed Paul's instructions to Timothy, "Watch your life and doctrine closely" (1 Tim. 4:16).

### **Michael Griffin** (*Senior Program Analyst, Office of the Director of National Intelligence*)

There are several lessons I learned when I first became an elder that I still rely on today. First, I was struck by how we always begin each difficult issue with the Scriptures, working outward to the practical application and policy derivation. Second, sitting among godly brothers in Christ, I learned how critical it is to listen carefully to each other and be slow to speak. Finally, I was (and still am) overwhelmed with the desperate need to undergird everything we do with prayer—for unless we are led by God, it is all for naught.

### **Jim Hollenbach** (*President, Simulation Strategies*)

Although Mark Dever has gifts, knowledge, experience, and a well-earned reputation that far exceed those of us around the table, he trusts God's plan for local church leadership by a plurality of elders and so humbly submits himself to the elders' collective wisdom. When I find myself thinking, "I'm right even though I'm in the minority," God's promises and Mark's example encourage me to defeat this sinful pride and joyfully accept the decisions of my fellow elders.

### **Papu Sandu** (*Senior Litigation Counsel, Justice Department*)



One of the clearest lessons was a greater understanding of just how important prayer is to the ministry of an elder, both individual prayer and praying with the other elders. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve with such godly and prayerful men, and that has made quite an impact. A second lesson is the need to cultivate a deep and fervent love for the members of our congregation; a love that earnestly desires to see them prosper spiritually. That, I think, is central to the work of an elder, and one that my brothers have modeled so well for me.

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## Caring for the Pastor: The Sabbatical

By Matt Schmucker

I have often likened pastors to bell towers: unless they are careful, they will ring one bell in their tower repeatedly. What do I mean? Even the best of preachers can begin to repeat the same theme and tone over and over in their preaching. A staleness or tired familiarity—one bell—begins to ring week in and week out. Why?

This exists, in part, due to fatigue. The role of pastor-preacher, if done faithfully, is one of the most taxing jobs in the world. It demands so many skills. It's emotionally taxing. And it's both so regular (that sermon is coming!) and so variable (who can predict funerals, illnesses, or member crises?). Congregations need to be aware of this and make provision *before* the "one bell syndrome" sets in.

One way to care for the pastor is by offering a planned and regular sabbatical. What do I mean by sabbatical?

I don't mean the biblical "sabbatical year" spoken of in the Old Testament, used to allow farm-land to remain uncultivated and debts to be forgiven (i.e. remitted).

For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat (Ex. 23:10-11).

At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release. And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor. He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the Lord's release has been proclaimed (Deut. 15 1-2).

I do mean the kind of sabbatical that our culture typically understands today. Wikipedia defines the sabbatical this way:

A sabbatical year is a prolonged hiatus, typically one year, in the career of an individual taken in order to fulfill some goal, e.g. writing a book or traveling extensively for research.

Sabbaticals are *not* vacations. We would encourage the pastor to see vacations as time completely away from his regular work (and geography, if financially affordable) and with the focus aimed squarely on his family. Sabbaticals on the other hand are not work-less and not aimed at the benefit of his family. They are specifically aimed at reinvigorating and renewing the mind and heart of the pastor through research, purposeful travel, writing, etc. In other words, the goal is to begin using some forgotten bells and to hang some new ones in that bell tower for a fuller, clearer, and louder sound.

Things to consider:

1. **Start out small:** If your church has never considered giving a pastor a sabbatical and seems resistant, start out small and let the idea grow. Have a five or ten year plan in your mind where the sabbatical idea flowers into the full vision you have. My own church allows each pastor to accrue one month of sabbatical time per each year of service. The pastor can take a maximum of three months sabbatical at any one time. Perhaps your church needs to start with a two week sabbatical every two years so that the pastor can take a seminary class. Don't worry about starting out small, just get started and allow the congregation to get comfortable with the idea and appreciate the fruit.
2. **Start out small (again!):** This time I'm not addressing length of time away, but the kind of sabbatical the pastor might take. There are "preaching sabbaticals," where the pastor carries his regular duties but is relieved of preaching duties to allow for more time in his week for reading and research. Then there are "radical sabbaticals," where the pastor is absent from all duties and absent from the church. Perhaps your church isn't ready for the radical sabbatical and needs to grow into that by starting with a preaching sabbatical. Again, start out small (if you need to) and let it grow.
3. **Care for the flock:** Prior to a sabbatical, the pastor and congregation needs to plan for the shepherding of the flock in the pastor's absence. The purpose of the sabbatical will be gutted if the pastor is regularly interrupted to care for the flock. Assign the preaching, counseling, funerals, and all the other regular duties.
4. **Plan the sabbatical:** The pastor needs to plan well in advance what he will be doing on the sabbatical, otherwise the precious time away can be wasted.
5. **Involve the congregation:** The pastor needs to share with the congregation his plans, prior to his leaving, so they can join him in his excitement and pray for fruit. The pastor will benefit from his sabbatical, but the congregation should too!

6. **Consider the season:** There are rhythms and seasons in a church's life that need to be considered in scheduling a sabbatical. For instance, in most churches, the fall seems to be far busier than the spring or summer. The pastor should take leave at a good time in the church's life.
7. **Communicate:** While on sabbatical, the pastor should consider regular communication with his congregation through open letters or articles in the church's newsletter.
8. **Set parameters:** If the pastor does not leave town, both pastor and church should have some understandings about "drop bys" and "pop ins" where the pastor is interrupted. These brief interruptions can halt fruitful thought and easily slide into a resumption of duties.
9. **Be accountable:** Consider setting up a system of accountability between the pastor on sabbatical and a fellow pastor/elder or board – leader to leader.
10. **Plan for the return:** If the pastor has taken a "radical sabbatical," he might consider returning a few days prior to resuming duties so that he can organize and reacquaint himself with both people and situations; it will make for an easier transition. The pastor also needs to remember that the congregation was not on sabbatical; it may need to be eased into his new ideas and renewed energy.

The church that cares for its pastor cares for itself. Consider the sabbatical. And let the bells ring!

*Matt Schmucker is the executive director of 9Marks and an elder at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC.*

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