What is Pastoral Leadership?

Pastoral Leadership is abandoning your life to the call of God, cooperating with the Holy Spirit, leading a church full of leaders, and much more.

Instead of letting church culture tell you who a pastor is and what he should do, let God tell you through the Bible. This guidebook to the great adventure of being a pastor follows the directions God gave Moses to effectively shepherd Israel:

Pray, Teach and Preach, Lead and Multiply.

Author Dave Earley writes to encourage pastors to become the spiritual warriors, missional leaders, and multiplying mentors God calls them to be.

"You should read this book with an open mind and open heart because Dave Earley knows pastoral leadership… He knew how to involve his team of pastors, as well as hundreds of lay people in reaching their part of the community for Christ, and will help you achieve that goal."
—Elmer L. Towns, cofounder, Liberty University

"Dave Earley loves God, people, and pastoring. He has spent a lifetime praying, preaching, and planting churches. He can really help you get a grip on what it means to be a pastor and a leader. Don’t miss this book. God will speak to you on every page."
—Ed Hindson, distinguished professor, Liberty University

"This book could not have been written at a better time! North America needs an army of pastoral leaders who embrace prayer, who teach the Word of God, and who lead and mentor leaders."
—John M. Bailey, North American Mission Board

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Pastoral Leadership Is . . .

Focusing on the Things Every Pastor Simply Must Do

Incredible!

Moses and the people of God had just experienced the incredible power of God as He delivered them from being the slaves of Egypt. Through the deliberate use of ten miraculous plagues, God had not only struck down the Egyptians’ religion, but had shown His great power and His deep compassion for His people.

Annoying!

It would be easy to feel a little sorry for Moses. At this point, he was more than eighty years old and stuck in the desert with tens of thousands of irritable and immature people.

Instead of sitting back to enjoy retirement, he was leading one of the most frustrating mobs ever assembled. The Israelites had spent decades in slavery, and their new liberty quickly turned to license. Every time he turned around, Moses found them either rebelling or griping.

Moses felt the weight of the responsibility and the depth of the frustration of leading the Hebrew nation safely through the wiles of the wilderness into
the Promised Land when they would have preferred to return to the familiar bondage of Egypt. Shepherding them was like trying to herd cats.

**Ridiculous!**

Moses was trying to be everyone’s pastor, chaplain, counselor, and judge. Jethro, his father-in-law, happened to be visiting. Jethro, a veteran shepherd who oversaw massive herds in Midian, noticed how Moses was shepherding Israel. He could see that Moses was not being very effective.

When Moses’ father-in-law saw everything he was doing for them he asked, “What is this thing you’re doing for the people? Why are you alone sitting as judge, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?” Moses replied to his father-in-law, “Because the people come to me to inquire of God. Whenever they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I make a decision between one man and another. I teach [them] God’s statutes and laws.” “What you’re doing is not good,” Moses’ father-in-law said to him. “You will certainly wear out both yourself and these people who are with you, because the task is too heavy for you. You can’t do it alone. (Exod 18:14–18)

**Amnesia!**

Moses knew better than to be the solo-shepherd for the flock of God. God had strategically placed Moses with Jethro for the previous decades in order for Moses to learn the nuances of leading a large flock in difficult terrain. But for some reason, when the people clamored for help, Moses forgot all he had learned and defaulted to trying to meet their needs himself. It was the pathway to burnout and the prescription for failure.

**Avoiding the Trap**

The majority of the churches in America are struggling. As many as 85 percent of the churches in the United States are plateaued or in decline. Most of the struggling churches are led by a solo-pastor, who is falling into the same trap that swallowed Moses. Instead of leading a large, healthy, growing flock into the Promised Land, these “Lone Ranger” pastors are struggling to keep an aging flock of an average of seventy members alive. They are expending all
of their energies trying to be everyone’s pastor, chaplain, and counselor, all the while missing the three things every pastor simply must do.

Beyond the struggles of the churches, the majority of the pastors in the United States are struggling personally. The grind of the demands of the solo-pastor is burning American pastors out. Licensed professional counselor Michael Todd Wilson and veteran pastor Brad Hoffman report the following sobering statistics in their book *Preventing Ministry Failure*.

- 90 percent of American pastors surveyed feel inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands.
- 45 percent say they have experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they needed to take a leave of absence.²

Every month, 1,500 pastors leave the ministry permanently in America. Many more would leave if they could afford it. In a recent survey, more than 50 percent of pastors said they would leave their ministry if they could replace their income.³

In their book *Pastors at Greater Risk*, H. B. London and Neil Wiseman quote startling statistics from research conducted by Fuller Theological Seminary. These statistics are the reflection of the trap of the “Lone Ranger” pastor.

- 80 percent of pastors say they have insufficient time with spouse and that ministry has a negative effect on their family.
- 40 percent report a serious conflict with a parishioner once a month.
- 75 percent report they have had a significant stress-related crisis at least once in their ministry.
- 45 percent of pastors’ wives say the greatest danger to them and family is physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual burnout.
- 21 percent of pastors’ wives want more privacy.
- Pastors who work fewer than fifty hours a week are 35 percent more likely to be terminated.
- 40 percent of pastors considered leaving the pastorate in the past three months.
- 25 percent of pastors’ wives see their husband’s work schedule as a source of conflict.
- 48 percent of pastors think being in ministry is hazardous to family well-being.⁴

Of course, this is not the way God planned it. What is the problem? Part of the problem is too many pastors expend all of their energies trying to be the
solo-pastor, chaplain, and counselor and are failing to focus on the three things every pastor simply must do.

A Plea for Sanity and the Three Things Every Spiritual Shepherd Simply Must Do

God used Jethro to speak into Moses’ life. As a wise advisor, he not only told Moses that what he was doing was wrong, but he also took the next step and told Moses what it was that he needed to do to correct it.

Now listen to me; I will give you some advice, and God be with you. You be the one to represent the people before God and bring their cases to Him. Instruct them about the statutes and laws, and teach them the way to live and what they must do. But you should select from all the people able men, God-fearing, trustworthy, and hating bribes. Place [them] over the people as officials of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. They should judge the people at all times. Then they can bring you every important case but judge every minor case themselves. In this way you will lighten your load, and they will bear [it] with you. If you do this, and God [so] directs you, you will be able to endure, and also all these people will be able to go home satisfied.” (Exod 18:19–23)

Jethro’s advice is crammed with insight and wisdom. Before we see the requirements, let’s look at the results. Notice that in verses 22–23 Jethro promises Moses that if he focuses on doing the three things every pastor must do, leadership will be less stressful for him, and he will be able to endure the strain of shepherding a massive flock. On top of that, the people will prosper. That is better than a struggling flock with a burnt-out shepherd.

So what are the three things every spiritual shepherd simply must do?

1. Pray—“Be the one to represent the people before God and bring their cases to Him” (v. 19).
2. Teach the people how to live the Word of God—“Instruct them about the statutes and laws, and teach them the way to live and what they must do” (v. 20).
3. Equip and mentor the next layers of leaders—“Select from all the people able men, God-fearing, trustworthy, and hating bribes. Place [them] over the people as officials of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens” (v. 21).
Jesus and the Three Things Every Pastor Simply Must Do

Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). If anyone can offer insight into that on which an effective spiritual shepherd should concentrate, it is Jesus. So what did Jesus focus on in His ministry? Did He attend board meetings, visit hospitals, or do counseling?

So what did He do?

You guessed it. Jesus primarily focused on the same three things Jethro told Moses to do: pray, teach the Word, and lead leaders.

1. Pray

Yes, Jesus is God, but do not miss the fact that Jesus Christ was also an amazing man of prayer. Samuel Dickey Gordon summarizes the prayer life of the leader Jesus when he writes, “The \textit{man} Christ Jesus \textit{prayed}; prayed \textit{much}; \textit{needed} to pray; \textit{loved} to pray.”\footnote{He added, “Jesus prayed. He loved to pray. . . . He prayed so much and so often that it became a part of His life. It became to Him like breathing—involuntary.”\cite{Bounds} Edward M. Bounds concurs, “Prayer filled the life of our Lord while on earth. . . . Nothing is more conspicuous in the life of our Lord than prayer.”\cite{Bounds}}

Yes, I have heard the argument that we cannot pray like He did because He was the Son of God. But, that is the point. If Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man, needed to pray, \textit{how much more} do you and I?

In the Gospels there are fifteen accounts of Jesus praying. Eleven are found in Luke’s Gospel. Why? The answer is that of the four Gospel writers, Luke focused most on the \textit{human} aspect of Jesus. Luke wanted us to see that, as a \textit{human} leader, Jesus lived a life of prayer. Jesus was fully God and fully man. If Jesus, the human, made time to pray, \textit{how much more} should you and I?

2. Teach the Word

Jesus was a powerful biblical preacher. Jesus’ first sermon was quoting the law to Satan (Deut 6:13,16; 8:3) and skillfully applying it to the situation (Matt 4:1–11). His second sermon was a dramatic reading of Isa 61:1–2 and the proclamation that this Scripture was being fulfilled as He spoke. As a rabbi, He had to know the Word of God thoroughly and teach it.
3. Equip and Mentor Leaders

Jesus was the master disciple-maker. Being Jewish, Jesus followed a rabbinical model of disciple development. He selected and called twelve to be with Him for training in ministry (Mark 1:16–20; 3:12–19). The climax of His ministry to them was His commissioning of them to be disciple-makers also (Matt 28:18–20). He developed His leaders, and they were able to carry on the ministry and take it to the world after He ascended into Heaven.

The Apostles and the Three Things Every Pastor Simply Must Do

The apostles started the church in Jerusalem with huge success—three thousand people baptized the first day and others saved daily (Acts 2:41–47). This amazing growth led to inevitable growing pains. Soon the apostles found themselves getting sucked into the trap of doing the ministry themselves and neglecting the three things pastors simply must do. This was not good for them, and it was causing some of the flock to be neglected.

Wisely, they called for an adjustment in priorities. They returned to prayer, teaching the Word, and leading by developing and deploying other leaders.

Then the Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, “It would not be right for us to give up preaching about God to wait on tables. Therefore, brothers, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the preaching ministry.” (Acts 6:2–4)

They chose to follow the same advice that Jethro had given Moses. They asked the church to help them to concentrate their energies on the things every spiritual shepherd simply must do.

1. Pray—“We will devote ourselves to prayer” (v. 4).
2. Teach the Word of God—“It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God . . . we will devote ourselves to . . . the ministry of the word” (vv. 2–4 ESV).
3. Lead by developing and deploying other leaders—“Pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty” (v. 3 ESV).
How did it work? The good news is that the church agreed and supported them. As a result, God was able to richly bless them and grow the church.

The proposal pleased the whole company. So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte from Antioch. They had them stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the preaching about God flourished, the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:5–7)

Paul and the Three Things Every Pastor Simply Must Do

Paul was the mentor of several young pastors, including Timothy. We are fortunate to have several of the letters Paul gave Timothy detailing how he was to fulfill his spiritual shepherding responsibilities. Like Jesus and the apostles, there is no mention of many of the responsibilities that we assume as essential for pastors in our Western context. Paul says nothing about committee meetings, hospital visitation, or performing funeral services.

Instead, just as we saw from Jethro and Moses, Jesus, and the apostles, Paul encouraged Timothy to focus on three essential tasks: pray, teach the Word, and lead leaders.

1. Pray

Paul intentionally reminded Timothy of the importance of prayer. He advised Timothy that as the spiritual shepherd for the church at Ephesus, one task was priority one—prayer.

First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone. . . . (1 Tim 2:1)

2. Teach the Word

Throughout his letters to Timothy, Paul reminds him of the importance of sound teaching. Paul commanded Timothy to “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15 NIV). He further charged him to “preach the word” (2 Tim 4:2 NIV).
3. Lead

Paul had modeled the importance of mentoring rising leaders to Timothy when he took Timothy under his wing during his church-planting trips. In his letters, Paul told Timothy that one of his primary responsibilities was to also train faithful men who would be able to disciple others.

And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Tim 2:2)

Beyond that, Paul told Timothy’s congregation, the Ephesians, that Timothy and the other pastor-teachers that might have been in their church were Christ’s gift to the church (Eph 4:11). He also said that the responsibility of those pastors was to equip each member to do the work of ministry (Eph 4:12). Doing so results in the growth of the members and the increase of the body.

And He personally gave . . . some pastors and teachers, for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, . . . From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part. (Eph 4:11–12,16)

Warning!

While this book will discuss some of the pastoral responsibilities that fit within the cultural idea of an American pastor, that is not the emphasis. In an attempt to be as biblical as possible, the lion’s share of this book will focus on inspiring and instructing pastors in the three tasks every effective spiritual shepherd simply must do: Pray, Teach the Word, and Lead.

Of course, we will also discuss the type of person a pastor must be. We will conclude with an overview of some of the other activities in which a shepherd-leader must be involved.

← What Now? →

I suggest that a pastor spends at least 25 percent of his time investing in prayer, 25 percent in studying and teaching the Word, and 25 percent equipping saints and developing leaders. This means in a sixty-hour work week, he’s spending fifteen hours praying with and for people, fifteen hours studying and teaching, and fifteen hours developing potential multipliers. How can you begin to implement this ratio in your current ministry?
The timeworn work of the pastor, such as solid exegetical preaching, prayer and disciple-making, [has] gone out of style.

—Bill Hull

Notes

6. Ibid., 209.