

“How I wish I could have read this book when I was starting out in pastoral ministry forty-five years ago. Phil Newton offers practical wisdom that will help pastors young and old. It will be a special encouragement to pastors just starting out in the ministry. These forty questions cover the full range of questions pastors face. Dr. Newton offers tested wisdom that is both biblical and practical. I hope you will buy two copies—one to read and one to give to a young pastor. Outstanding!”

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—Brian Croft
Senior Pastor, Auburndale Baptist Church
Founder, Practical Shepherding
Senior Fellow, Church Revitalization Center, SBT’S

“Combining rich insights from years of pastoral experience with a theologically-shaped and biblically-informed approach to ministry, Phil Newton has provided readers with a welcomed addition to Kregel’s 40 Questions series. Ministers need not agree with Newton’s theological and ecclesiological convictions to profit from reading this thoughtful and applicable handbook on pastoral ministry. *40 Questions About Pastoral Ministry* will serve as a valuable resource and helpful guide for pastors at various stages of their ministries. I am delighted to recommend this fine work.”

—David S. Dockery

President, International Alliance for Christian Education
Distinguished Professor of Theology, Southwestern Seminary

“Whether one is an experienced pastor or one just starting in ministry, having a ministry coach is extremely helpful—someone to whom we might ask questions, gain insight, and find a way forward in tricky ministry situations. In picking up *40 Questions About Pastoral Ministry*, you have the voice of an experienced pastor-coach: someone who has followed Jesus in the midst of the challenges of ministry and someone who offers wise counsel to the most common questions we might have. Phil Newton has produced a goldmine of pastoral wisdom that should be a go-to book for pastors in every stage of ministry. I know that I will be pulling it off my shelf time and again to hear from my ministry coach!”

—Dr. Sean Michael Lucas

Senior Pastor, Independent Presbyterian Church (PCA), Memphis, TN
Chancellor’s Professor of Church History, Reformed Theological Seminary

“It’s one thing for Christian leaders to be admired from afar. It’s another thing for one’s fellow elders and a host of pastors of other congregations in one’s own city to regard a man as a living example of what a biblically faithful pastor is supposed to look like. By God’s grace, Dr. Phil Newton is such a man. In *40 Questions About Pastoral Ministry* you will read with great profit what I and many other pastors have experienced first-hand from Phil’s life and ministry. This brother is a pastoral ninja.

“Over the past 20 years Phil and I have become dear friends. When I spend time with him, I walk away knowing he loves Jesus, loves me, and loves local churches. In this volume he imparts to fellow pastors not only the gospel of God but also his own life as well (1 Thess. 2:8).

“Pastors, *for Christ’s sake* I double-dog-dare-you to prayerfully digest this abundantly wise counsel from a seasoned soul-physician whose eyes, for decades, have been fixed on the Wonderful Counselor.”

—Jordan Thomas

Pastor, Grace Church, Memphis

“Since I began in pastoral ministry, Phil Newton has generously shared his extensive wisdom with me and encouraged me along the way. With *40 Questions About Pastoral Ministry*, I rejoice that his biblical knowledge and wisdom is now readily available to many others. This book is a treasure trove of doctrinally sound wisdom and insight

formed as the result of Phil's careful study and faithfulness through the challenges and joys over the long haul of pastoral ministry. If you are a pastor, desire to be a pastor, or simply want to better understand what the Scriptures teach about this biblical office, read this book. And, when you finish, keep it handy as you will want to come back to the wisdom in this book for years to come."

—Josh Manley

Senior Pastor, RAK Evangelical Church, Ras al Khaimah, United Arab Emirates

"Pastoring seems to be getting harder not easier. Consequently, it's a necessity now more than ever for pastors to have more experienced colleagues in ministry they can turn to with questions. Phil Newton, a humble, experienced pastor with a long-term ministry in one church, has written *40 Questions About Pastoral Ministry* to help answer some of those questions. Whether you're a young or old pastor, a new or experienced pastor, or alone or one of many pastors, you will benefit from hearing Phil answer your questions. So, pick up this book, and let Pastor Newton encourage you."

—Juan R. Sanchez

Senior Pastor, High Pointe Baptist Church, Austin, TX

Author of *The Leadership Formula: Develop the Next Generation of Leaders in the Church*

"Pastors are called by God to serve the people of God. Pastors are formed into faithful and effective servants that God desires them to be through the process of understanding the very responsibilities that their calling assigns to them. Crucial to their development is being mentored by a seasoned pastor who joyfully accepts his assignment. Phil Newton uses his pen in this volume to mentor pastors as he raises forty essential questions about pastoral ministry and seeks to answer them biblically, theologically, and practically. His wise and winsome answers have been formed from more thirty-five years of serving as a pastor. I have admired his ministry for more than twenty years. Phil does not just know how to be a shepherd; he walks with the Chief Shepherd. I can't think of a better person to mentor those who are called to pastoral ministry whether they are early in their development or have been serving as a pastor for years. They all will benefit from *40 Questions About Pastoral Ministry*."

—Keith Whitfield

Provost Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and
Associate Professor of Theology, Wake Forest, NC

"There is something for pastors at every stage of ministry in this book. For the future pastor, there is a roadmap to show him what lies ahead. For the young pastor, there's wisdom to help when the curves grow hard to navigate. For the veteran pastor, there's help to know which road to take next. This will be required reading for all my pastoral interns from now on. My longtime friend Phil Newton is a trusted voice who knows every pothole in pastoral ministry because he's had to drive through every single one on the way to decades of faithful local church leadership."

—Jeff Robinson

Lead Pastor, Christ Fellowship Baptist Church, Louisville, KY

“As I began to read Phil Newton’s book, *40 Questions About Pastoral Ministry*, I put my highlighter down. I gazed at the fluorescent yellow manuscript pages on the desk before me and came to the realization that highlighting everything is highlighting nothing. However, when I read this book, I also quickly became aware that it was penned with a quill dipped in the author’s own blood. It was authored from wisdom of four decades of faithful pastoral ministry and walking intimately with Christ. Like a typical Phil Newton expository sermon, every word in this book matters. You cannot compose a work like *40 Questions About Pastoral Ministry* as the byproduct of a research project. Writing this particular memoir and manual of biblical shepherding, takes a lifetime. In these pages, Phil keenly unfolds what Scripture teaches regarding ministry, including the foundational considerations of the pastorate, pastoral development and health, and pastoral practices. Each of these categories is fleshed out by biblical, historical, and personal examples that demonstrate the timeless biblical and theological principles outlined. Very few resources of this sort strike the right balance of grace and truth, and of admonition and encouragement. While maintaining the high bar that Scripture gives for pastoral ministry, Phil likewise expresses God’s promises of grace and provision for those whom he calls.

“In the mold of such classics as Richard Baxter’s *Reformed Pastor* and C. H. Spurgeon’s *Lectures to My Students*, many generations have someone to assume the responsibility for writing a timeless, biblical pastoral manifesto. I praise the Lord that Phil Newton is among those who have assumed this burden for our generation and the generations to come, if the Lord tarries. Fellow pastors, do not just skim through this book. Live with it and allow it to guide you to depend more deeply on the perfect Chief Shepherd, who needs no manual of instruction.”

—Brad Walker, Senior Pastor
First Baptist Church of Sparta, TN

40 QUESTIONS ABOUT Pastoral Ministry

Phil A. Newton

Benjamin L. Merkle, Series Editor



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40 Questions About Pastoral Ministry

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Foreword

by Matt McCullough

When I was a college student, just an eighteen-year-old kid with little knowledge and even less experience, Phil Newton and the members of South Woods Baptist Church opened their lives to me. It's not overstating things to say that those two summers changed my life. As an intern I got backstage access to the workings of a healthy local church. And I got a long look at the life and ministry of a faithful pastor who loves his people, who loves God's Word, and whose joy in life is bridging the two, in public and in private.

I did a lot of watching over those two summers. I got some practice, too, muddling my way through a few of my first sermons. Along the way I asked lots of questions. Lots and lots of questions. The answers Phil gave then continue to shape my ministry today. And what I love about this book is that it gives you the same chance that I had to learn from this faithful brother. Reading this book felt a bit like a walk back in time.

There are many reasons this book will be a helpful addition to your pastoral library. Like the other titles in the 40 Questions series, this book is a tool to be used. The structure and format make the content accessible quickly and easily. The questions themselves are well chosen and well framed. They're real questions, in other words, that sooner or later will resonate with what you're going through. And the answers are consistently helpful and concise.

But the main reason I believe this book will be useful to you is that in it you get to learn ministry from Phil Newton. You'll find here the same three things I appreciated most from my time as his intern and that I've appreciated in his friendship ever since.

First, you'll find a tremendous pastoral bibliography. Phil has spent his career poring over the riches of the Reformed pastoral tradition. In these answers you'll see what he's found. And I think you'll grow to love these teachers as he does.

Second, you'll find careful study of what the Bible says about pastoral ministry. Phil knows better than to stand on his own wisdom. Our only hope for fruitfulness in the work God has given us depends on following the guidance God has given us in his Word. In every answer to every question you'll

find Phil taking you back to the Scriptures. And along the way this book will help you build a robust biblical theology of ministry.

Finally, you'll find the benefit of a lifetime of pastoral experience. I've said Phil stands on God's Word, not his own wisdom, but there's plenty of hard-earned wisdom in these pages too. For four decades he has tested the advice of all those pastoral books. For four decades he has trusted the guidance of God's Word. And he's done it all in the daily and weekly rhythms—dare I say grind?—of a pastoral ministry just like yours and mine. You will be able to tell. Phil is a guide who has been there.

So, whether you're a young pastor needing an ally, or a pastor looking for resources to help you train others, this is a book you can use. I certainly will.

Introduction

Most of my life has been spent in pastoring four churches from 1978 to the present. All were very different. Each needed faithful pastoral ministry. Sometimes I had no idea how to handle opposition, reform worship, preach pastorally, develop leaders, face discouragement, or change polity, among dozens of other matters. Seasoned pastors often came to my aid in answering questions (I had more than forty!). Other times, a good pastoral biography brought light—for example, Edwards, Spurgeon, Lloyd-Jones. On still other occasions, God's Word and prayer led me from quandary to settled joy. Throughout, I've sensed God's faithfulness and my weakness while learning what it means to shepherd the flock.

For years, I've been fielding questions from pastors about a variety of issues faced in life and ministry. Just as with this book, a combination of biblical exegesis, pastoral theology, and experience formed my responses. Pastoral ministry has its foundation in God's Word, works out in theological reflection, and is applied in the contextual experience of pastor and congregation. Consequently, to probe pastoral ministry, this book works through Scripture, considers theological implications, and illustrates from personal experience. Forty questions cannot exhaust pastoral work, of course, but they do provide a framework for issues facing pastors.

The book's five sections give readers a means to narrow answers about pastoral ministry. First, *foundational considerations* look at what it means to be a pastor, with attention to the character and necessary qualities for spiritual work. Second, *pastoral development and health* keep the long view in mind, steering pastors to ways that give attention to personal walk, marriage, family, relationships, and practices for endurance. Third, *pastoral practices* identify how a pastor should *pastor* the flock, handle opposition, and train leaders. Fourth, *pastoral preaching*, as the heart of pastoral ministry, centers corporate gatherings in the gospel. Fifth, *the church and pastoral ministry* starts with the nature of the church then moves to developing healthy church practices. Each question helps pastors navigate the challenges of ministry.

In my study of passages referring to and alluding to pastoral ministry, I'm convinced the pastoral office is given to men by the Lord of the church. While certainly not excluding areas of ministry for the many faithful, godly women who serve in myriad ways in the church, my conviction in this volume

focuses on men holding pastoral responsibility. I'm grateful for many women who have served Christ in multiple ways in churches I've been part of. Their influence and insights in my pastoral labors is a special gift of God to me, and the other pastors serving with me.

I wrote most of this book during medical leave, as I required isolation for chemotherapy. In many ways, it served as a balm for my mental and spiritual life while my body got pounded. I'm grateful for the congregation and elders at South Woods Baptist Church in Memphis for their love and support throughout my ministry, but especially during these more challenging days. They've modeled care for their pastor.

As I finished each question, I passed it along to Matt Sliger, Chris Spano, Raymond Johnson, and Tom Tollett, who graciously read through rough drafts, offering corrections, making suggestions, and prodding me forward. While the remaining deficiencies are mine, their investment and pastoral insight improved what you will read. Thank you, brothers! Several local pastors initiated opportunities to field-test much of the book's material, including Jordan Thomas, Jeremy Wright, Ben Williams, and Nathan Sawyer. My deep thanks go to Matt Gentry and Joey Newton for help with editing. Debbie Jones assisted in countless ways. Through lots of discussion, my fellow elders and pastoral interns honed many of the ideas presented.

I've long appreciated Ben Merkle's scholarship and writing contributions for the church. I'm grateful to work with him as the 40 Questions series editor. This book represents my fourth time working with Kregel Publications. Dennis Hillman got things rolling with this book, then retired and passed it into the very capable hands of Laura Bartlett. Robert Hand and Bethany Murphy added their eyes toward editorial improvements. I'm thankful for their professionalism, dependable communication, and friendship.

Karen, my wife, has listened to my musings on various questions, encouraged me when I felt too fatigued to write, and supported me throughout this book. I would not have gotten far in pastoral ministry without her constant love and faithful endurance.

As with Karen, my children have lived the contents of this book with me. They've journeyed in pastoral ministry's ups and downs, joys and sorrows, triumphs and losses from the vantage point of pastor's kids. Throughout, they've continued to love and encourage me. During this hard season of life, they've been a ballast to keep me from sinking. Thanks Kelly, Andrew, John, Lizzy, and Stephen! I hope the journey has left wonderful memories and a faithful example to follow Christ in all things. This book is dedicated to you.

QUESTION 1

What Is a Pastor?

As a college junior, my heart burned to pastor God's flock. Having sensed this call to ministry five years earlier, this calling began to narrow. At the time, I served on a church staff discipling young adults and teenagers. By doing pastoral work, my calling became clearer. Although seeing only the edges of pastoral ministry, my spirit leaped at the chance to shepherd members of our church toward spiritual health.

Had you pinned me down to ask, "What is a pastor?" I would likely have said, "A shepherd." Of course, that's correct since the English term "pastor," derived from the Old French *pastor*, and the Latin *pastorem*, means *shepherd*.¹ When referring to a leadership office in the church, we use the term metaphorically (we do not mean the actual herding of sheep). Through the centuries, governments and religious groups have used *shepherd* to refer to one ruling, leading, or caring for them. The Bible also uses the term metaphorically. How does it speak to the question, "What is a *pastor*?"

Shepherd as a Metaphor

The ancient Near Eastern culture and Holy Scripture regularly use *shepherd* metaphorically.² When considering shepherd as a metaphor, Timothy Laniak explains, we drag "a collection of inter-related associations from the source domain into the target domain as *prospects* for comparison."³ In other words, we take up the original concept of shepherding sheep, mull the various implications involved in that work, and *then* consider how it is used metaphorically in various biblical contexts. From this process, we begin to derive an understanding of *shepherd/pastor*. Answering the question, "What is a

1. "Pastor," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, www.etymonline.com.

2. See Timothy Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, NSBT 20, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 31–74.

3. Laniak, *Shepherds*, 33 (emphasis original).

pastor?” by merely saying, “a shepherd” proves inadequate until we arrive at its meaning in the original metaphor as developed in Scripture.

The noun *shepherd* (Greek: *poimēn*) is used eighteen times in the NT, but translated only once as *pastor* (Eph. 4:11).⁴ The remaining uses of *poimēn* shed light on the nominal and verbal meanings when referring to the office of pastor/elder.⁵ Moisés Silva explains that Greek literature used *poimēn* literally and figuratively, even for “the divine shepherd.” Metaphorically, it expressed guidance and cherishing. While often describing the actual practice of herding sheep, the biblical term also finds prominent imagery for Yahweh shepherding his people Israel.⁶ Likewise, we find the NT picking up the shepherding imagery of Yahweh and applying it to the Good Shepherd in John 10. Jesus saw the distressed and dispirited multitudes “like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36). Paralleling the OT picture of Yahweh, the Gospels fill out the work of Jesus *shepherding*, as he sought to draw near, protect, provide, and guide the shepherdless crowds.⁷ But the Good Shepherd goes one step further: he lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11–18), as prophesied by Zechariah (Zech. 13:7).⁸ From the OT use of *Shepherd* in reference to Yahweh to its NT use in Jesus the Good *Shepherd*, we begin to see the metaphor’s background for the NT office of pastor/shepherd.

Pastors as Reflections of a Model

Neglecting the OT use of Yahweh as Shepherd when thinking of the church office of pastor/elder/overseer impoverishes the term. As the patriarch Israel blessed Joseph’s sons, he called Yahweh “the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day” (Gen. 48:15). He expressed Yahweh’s care, guidance, and protection. Similarly, the psalmist describes the Lord’s power in delivering Israel from Egypt: “But He led forth His own people like sheep and guided

4. *NIDNTTE*, 4:84. The following translate ποιμήν (*poimēn*) as *pastor*: NASB, NKJV, HCSB, GNT, RSV, NIV, while the ESV retains *shepherd*.

5. When using *pastor* as an office, I do so with the understanding of its synonymous use with *elder* and *overseer*, both found more frequently in the NT, representing one church office, with deacon being the other office. Both offices are always referred to in plurality. For the synonymous use of the terms for the one office in the church, see Benjamin L. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church*, SBL 57, ed. Hemchand Gossai (New York: Peter Lang, 2003); Benjamin L. Merkle, *Forty Questions About Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2008), 54–56; Phil A. Newton and Matt Schmucker, *Elders in the Life of the Church: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2014), 45–57. The use of one article in Ephesians 4:11 for pastors and teachers indicates a better translation as “pastor-teacher.” See Merkle, *Forty Questions About Elders and Deacons*, 55–56.

6. *NIDNTTE*, 81–83; mostly “in Jeremiah (19x), Ezekiel (17x), Genesis (13x), and Zechariah (9x).” Family members were the primary shepherds in common OT usage. The Septuagint used the term eighty times.

7. Laniak, *Shepherds*, 78–84 (see Exod. 15:13; 33:15–16; Deut. 23:14; Pss. 78:19; 105:40–41).

8. *NIDNTTE*, 4:85.

them in the wilderness like a flock” (Ps. 78:52). Psalm 80:1 sounds the same note on leadership. “Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock.” No wonder there’s great comfort in Psalm 100:3, “We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.” The Lord leads, protects, comforts, and provides for his flock (Ps. 23). This divine leadership occasionally took place through human instruments. “You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron” (Ps. 77:20), giving hint toward the NT use of *shepherd*.

The biblical narratives utilize shepherd language to describe David’s kingship. In the ancient Near East, shepherding language “is attached most often to the institution of Kingship (both divine and human).”⁹ First, David is introduced as a literal shepherd (1 Sam. 16:11; 17:28, 34). Significantly, when David joined the tribes of Israel at Hebron on the occasion of anointing him as king, the leaders identified him as a shepherd/king. “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). Here, *shepherd* “originated with reference to middle-level shepherd contractors,” writes Laniak, showing the connection of the newly appointed king under the Lord God’s authority. “Israel received its desired king, but only on the condition that it understood his [the king’s] role as derivative from and dependent upon the rule of YHWH, the flock’s true Owner.”¹⁰ As the true Shepherd, the Lord gave Israel’s king responsibilities as an undershepherd in care, rule, and protection.

Four of the prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah—make extensive use of pastoral language (a) to describe the Lord God (Isa. 40:11; Jer. 31:10; Ezek. 34:11–15; Zech. 9:16); (b) to rebuke unfaithful civil and religious leaders (Jer. 10:21; 23:1–2; Ezek. 34:1–10; Zech. 10:2–3); (c) to anticipate the Good Shepherd (Ezek. 34:23–24; Zech. 13:7–9); and (d) to assure that he would appoint faithful shepherds for his people (Jer. 3:15; 23:3–4). The future pastoral office remained clearly in view throughout the OT.

The emphasis on the Lord God as Shepherd communicates his presence, care, nurture, comfort, protection, guidance, leadership, and provision. *Any future use of the shepherding metaphor for those serving his flock must connect these characteristics to pastoral ministry.* With the NT pastoral office in view, Yahweh’s appointed “shepherds were not expected simply to tend a flock; they were serving its Owner.”¹¹ Pastors, consequently, must reflect the model of the Lord God as Shepherd over his flock.

Pastors as Promised Servants

Israel grew accustomed to kings who *neglected* defending the weak, judging impartially, leading in the ways of the Lord, and keeping personal

9. Laniak, *Shepherds*, 94.

10. Laniak, *Shepherds*, 102.

11. Laniak, *Shepherds*, 152.

desires in check. Likewise, the priestly religious leaders disregarded those they should have shepherded toward faithful dependence upon the Lord. Consequently, the Lord took action.

First, he proclaimed that he would rescue his flock. He took initiative to deliver his people from bondage, implying future salvific peace in the Lord's presence (Ezek. 34:11–16). This promise lays groundwork for the NT use of the church as God's flock (John 10:1–30; Heb. 13:20–21).

Second, he promised to send faithful shepherds to care for, protect, guide, and provide for his flock (Jer. 3:15). "I will also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them" (Jer. 23:4). In this eschatological passage, Jeremiah points to Jesus, the coming Messianic King, giving assurance that God would "raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land" (Jer. 23:5). The flock that the future shepherds would tend belongs to the promised Messiah. His promised shepherds find fulfillment in the church's pastoral office (elder/overseer). Kings and priests failed to shepherd God's flock. However, the new covenant foresaw a different dimension of shepherds who cared for the flock. Laniak observes, "It illustrates what we will call a 'divine preference for human agency.' Appointment by God implies calling, stewardship and accountability."¹² He calls forth the promised shepherds to faithfully tend his flock.

The divine promise of faithful shepherds for God's flock adds weightiness to pastors serving local congregations. God's promise of faithful shepherds came in connection with the promised Davidic Messiah (Jer. 23:5–6). No wonder Paul used such striking language to remind the Ephesian elders that they didn't merely have a job, but were shepherding people purchased at the cost of Jesus's bloody death: "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" (Acts 20:28). These men, along with countless pastors through the centuries, answered the prophetic promise to shepherd the blood-bought church of God.

Pastors as Appointed Instruments

"What does the exalted Christ give to the Church?" asks Andrew Lincoln, referring to Ephesians 4:11: "He gives people, these particular people who proclaim the word and lead."¹³ The apostolic and prophetic gifts served in the earliest days of the church, but they did not continue in the same manner beyond that period. Apostles and prophets laid the foundation of the church in every age, particularly by the special inspiration through which they gave us God's Word.¹⁴ This seems to have clearly been Paul's position (Eph. 2:19–

12. Laniak, *Shepherds*, 21–22.

13. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 249.

14. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 585.

22; 3:1–10). Once their work of laying the foundation of the gospel in the church took place, as Thomas Schreiner notes, “such authoritative apostles and prophets are superfluous.”¹⁵ Likewise, evangelists served to extend the gospel where the church had not been planted. The remaining gift (or gifts), “teaching shepherds,” continues in the pastoral office of elder/overseer.¹⁶ Paul and Peter get at the heart of what it means to shepherd God’s flock. Elders must demonstrate an aptitude to teach in order to exhort in sound doctrine. This explains what it means to be “teaching shepherds” (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1–2; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9). “The functional talk about eldership,” Derek Tidball rightly states, “is cast in the metaphor of shepherding.”¹⁷ Shepherds teach the flock.

The phrase “He gave gifts to men” followed by “And He gave some . . . as pastors and teachers” indicates the pastoral office as the divinely appointed instrument to serve the church throughout the ages (Eph. 4:8, 11). Paul places pastors in the context of God’s gifts to mature and care for the church. He considered the necessity of pastoral leaders when we see him *appointing* elders in the new churches on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:23). He reconfirmed the responsibility of elders to shepherd the Ephesian church (Acts 20:28). Then he left Titus in Crete to appoint elders in communities where churches had been established (Titus 1:5). Since the Lord of the church appointed pastors to care for the flock, Paul insisted on pastoral care for churches he planted.

Pastors as Undershepherds to the Chief Shepherd

Before the ascension, Jesus called for Simon Peter to care for his flock (John 21:15–17). Jesus asked three times if he loved him. With each probing question, Peter affirmed his love for the Lord Jesus Christ. With each affirmation, Jesus followed with the call to shepherd the church: “Tend My lambs. . . . Shepherd My sheep. . . . Tend My sheep.” The first term, *tend* (*boske*), was the activity of herdsmen feeding and tending their sheep. *Shepherd* (*poimaine*), similarly, means to tend or give care to the flock.¹⁸ “Tend My sheep” (*boske*) reinforces the feeding, shepherding, and nurturing Jesus called Peter to regularly engage in with the church.

Thirty or more years later, as a seasoned church leader and apostle, Peter humbly wrote the elders of the scattered churches (1 Peter 5:1–5). He called himself a “fellow elder,” thus identifying with the shepherding and leadership

15. Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 723–24.

16. Merkle, *Forty Questions About Elders and Deacons*, 46–53.

17. Derek Tidball, *Ministry by the Book: New Testament Patterns for Pastoral Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 189.

18. BDAG, βόσκω, 181; *NIDNTTE*, ποιμαίνω, 4:81–87. Each verb is a present active imperative.

responsibilities of those caring for churches throughout ancient Asia Minor (1 Peter 1:1). With this identity, he also looked *back* as a “witness of the sufferings of Christ” and *ahead* as “a partaker of the glory that is to be revealed.” In doing so, he anchored his exhortations for pastoring in the cross, resurrection, reign, return, and hope of Christ, modeling the same anchor for these pastors as they served the church. He spoke to them eye to eye as fellow shepherds of the purchased flock.

How were these elders to see their responsibilities? They were to actively shepherd the flock. Peter had no need to list every shepherding detail. These early elders understood Jesus was their model for shepherding: pursuing wandering sheep, showing compassion, teaching the Scriptures, feeding and providing for the needy, healing the broken, nurturing the lambs with tenderness, calling his own by name, and laying down his life for the sheep. Yahweh provided the same kind of protection, provision, compassion, guidance, and nurturing for Israel.

In contrast to Israel’s wicked shepherds, the elders were to exercise 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” (1 Peter 5:2–3). Peter pictures men eager to humbly serve God’s flock, not mistaking it for *their own flock* that they could do with as they pleased, but exercising oversight “according to God.” As Laniak puts it, “Humility is the distinguishing mark of their service (1 Pet. 5:5–6).”¹⁹ They could only be examples (*tupoi*) if they were fellow members of the flock, participating fully in the life of the local church. Laniak wisely reminds us, “He is a follower *before* he is a leader. He is a leader *because* he is a follower.”²⁰ These elders came face to face with the reality that they were pastors only as they sought to care for the flock in the way Jesus modeled shepherding. They, and all faithful pastors with them, recognize that undershepherds join the Chief Shepherd in caring for his flock (1 Cor. 3:5–9).

Summary

What is a *pastor*? A shepherd of God’s flock, certainly, but the Bible freights the metaphor with meaning by how it uses the term.

(1) Pastors are those who *reflect* the model the Lord God gave in shepherding Israel: namely, prioritizing living among the flock, protecting spiritually, providing rich food from God’s Word, and leading toward holiness, maturity, and unity.

19. Laniak, *Shepherds*, 234.

20. Laniak, *Shepherds*, 22 (emphasis original). He adds, “Israel’s kings had to understand that being a member of the flock of God was more fundamental than being an appointed shepherd over the flock” (114).

(2) Pastors are those whom the Lord *promised* through the prophets he would raise up to care for his people—the church—in contrast to the many bad shepherds in Israel.

(3) Pastors are those *appointed* by the Lord Jesus as instruments to serve his church in equipping, building up, teaching sound doctrine, speaking the truth in love, and leading toward unity and maturity.

(4) Pastors are those recognized as *undershepherds* with responsibility to faithfully carry out shepherding responsibilities, conscious that they will give an account to the Chief Shepherd.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How does the OT model of the Lord as Shepherd inform and shape understanding of the question, “What is a pastor?”
2. How does the rebuke and judgment leveled against false, unfaithful shepherds in Israel (civil and religious) affect your thinking about God’s call to shepherd his flock?
3. In what way is the office of pastor (elder) an appointed instrument of Christ for the church?
4. How did Peter’s experience in John 21:15–17 transform his future view of pastoring?
5. In what ways does seeing oneself as being a member of a church *first* affect the way a man should view his office as pastor?

QUESTION 2

What Is Meant by Pastoral Ministry?

My first venture into pastoral ministry brought more questions than answers. As a nineteen-year-old ministry student, a small church asked me to lead their music. I agreed, if they would allow me to work with their students. The pastor never explained anything about ministry in general or in particular with that very unhealthy church. He just wanted me to show up, select a few hymns, and leave. He never asked how the students were responding to my Bible studies or discipling. He just didn't seem to care about anything that had to do with pastoral ministry. There I ascertained what *not* to do in pastoral ministry, even if I'd not yet learned what to do.

What is pastoral ministry? Simply, it's the work of pastors/elders. Yet that leaves us guessing about specifics. If we think of the pastor as a shepherd, we'll find the picture colored in a bit: pastoral ministry involves care, protection, provision, and nearness to the flock.

Sixteenth-century Strasbourg pastor Martin Bucer, John Calvin's mentor, saw pastoral ministry in a broad sweep before narrowing it: "The ministers of the church are to provide for Christ's lambs everything the Lord has promised to them in his office as shepherd."¹ Bucer follows after Jesus's way of shepherding his flock, along with what he promised in the gospel, as foundational for the breadth of pastoral ministry. He adds, ministers should see "that they [the flock] are deprived of nothing which contributes to their continual growth and increase in godliness."² Pastoral ministry focuses, then, on growth in godliness.

Timothy Laniak adds another layer to Bucer's thought: "A good shepherd is one who does what is required by each circumstance, in each context."³ In

1. Martin Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, trans. Peter Beale (1538; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 69.

2. Bucer, *Care of Souls*, 69.

3. Timothy Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, NSBT 20, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 40.

other words, while pastoral ministry has biblical similarities from one people group to another, the way pastoral practices work out in real life settings must not be thought of as monolithic. How I do pastoral ministry in Memphis may differ slightly from my friend pastoring in Nairobi. Some of the circumstances he faces—syncretism, extreme poverty, challenged meeting spaces, lack of male leadership—means he will emphasize some things differently than I do with my work. We'll still build around the basics, but our contexts will require putting weight on various aspects of ministry.

Why does the Lord choose pastors to do ministry? The Genevan reformer John Calvin explained that with the Lord of the church not visibly dwelling among us, he chose pastoral work by ministers “as sort of delegated work, not by transferring to them his right and honor, but only that through their mouths he may do his own work—just as a workman uses a tool to do his work.”⁴ Delegated work through *chosen tools* captures the idea of pastoral ministry. But what does it involve? We'll consider pastoral ministry through exploring one word that encapsulates it, five spiritual tasks it entails, and four specifics for pastoral ministry.

Pastoral Ministry in a Word

When Laniak describes the tireless work of shepherds in the ancient world with its implications for modern pastors, he writes, “Watching . . . is a comprehensive summary of shepherding tasks.”⁵ Andrew Davis agrees: “Essential to the work of a pastor is the laborious watchfulness as an undershepherd of the spiritual state of the flock.”⁶ In the midst of being “laborious,” *watchfulness* is never easy. It costs time, energy, tears, and discipline from the pastor who would be faithful to the Chief Shepherd in discharging his responsibilities for the flock's vitality (1 Peter 5:1–4).

The writer of Hebrews identifies watchfulness as an apt summary for pastoral work. “Obey your leaders and submit to them, *for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account*. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17, emphasis added). Charging the church to obey (*peithō*) or to follow and to submit to (*hupeikō*) or yield to the delegated authority⁷ of those leading them would be most natural *if* these spiritual leaders kept watch over their souls. To keep watch (*agrupneō*) meant to stay awake and alert, to sacrifice sleep and comfort

4. Calvin, 4.3.1.

5. Laniak, *Shepherds*, 233.

6. Andrew Davis, “Those Who Must Give an Account: A Pastoral Reflection,” in *Those Who Must Give an Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline*, eds. John S. Hammett and Benjamin L. Merkle (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 208–9. The balance of Davis's essay provides a sobering look at the pastor's accountability before the Chief Shepherd for his responsibilities.

7. BDAG, πείθω, 791–92, ὑπείκομαι, 1030.

for the purpose of vigilance.⁸ Faithful shepherds keep watch over the spiritual lives of their flocks.

Pastors can only keep watch over those whom they *observe*. They can only observe the changes, ups and downs, struggles, and progress for those whom they *know*. They can only know those in whom they *invest* their lives, labors, and prayers.⁹

Davis breaks down watchfulness into three areas. First, pastors watch over “the identity of the flock.” He writes, “Specifically, we must know the people the Lord has entrusted to us.” This kind of watchfulness means relationships built through personal contact. It’s difficult to shepherd strangers. Second, pastors watch over “the physical condition of the flock.” Davis writes that we need to know what’s happening in their lives, what challenges or trials they face, what’s happening in their family relationships, how they get along with others, and so on. These issues will affect their spiritual lives. Third, pastors watch over “the spiritual condition of the flock.” He breaks this into negative and positive sides. “Negatively, a pastor must be aware of the overpowering tendency every member of his flock has for drifting away from Christ through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:12–13). We mustn’t check our anthropology at the door of pastoral work. “Positively, a pastor must shepherd each member of the flock to be full of love and good deeds, developing fully the spiritual gifts Christ has entrusted to them” (Heb. 10:24–25). We must have aims with preaching, discipling, personal work, communication, and pastoral details that result in aiding the flock’s spiritual growth.¹⁰ That’s watchfulness over the flock.

Five Spiritual Tasks Entailed in Pastoral Ministry

Pastors can get easily sidetracked in pastoral ministry while dealing with administrative and organizational tasks. They can even forget *why* they’re organizing an event or ministry. *Pastoral ministry is about people*. Ironically, people sometimes get brushed behind paperwork, phone calls, emails, web details, podcasts, and pulls in a dozen directions. Bucer’s five main tasks, which he couples with five categories of people, are helpful for the spiritual lives of church members.

1. Do the Work of Evangelism: Lead to Faith in Christ the Lost Sheep Who’ve Not Recognized Christ as Lord

Bucer functioned out of a parish context that cemented together infant baptism and citizenship. Despite that practice, he recognized that many, including those baptized into the church as infants, had not come to faith in Christ. He

8. *NIDNTTE*, ἀγρυπνέω, 1:141–42.

9. For a classic example, see Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (1656; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974).

10. Davis, “Pastoral Reflection,” 211–12 (emphasis original).

calls on pastors to go after God's elect by going after those alienated from Christ (Matt. 22:1–14; Luke 14:16–24).¹¹ Here the pastor does the work of an evangelist, as Paul exhorted Timothy (2 Tim. 4:5), building relationships with unbelievers while looking for opportunity to speak the good news to them.

2. Do the Work of Formative Discipline: Restore Those Who've Fallen out of Fellowship with the Church Due to the Allurements of the Flesh or False Doctrine¹²

Pastoral ministry involves *watchfulness*. Particularly, pastors need to keep watch on those who have given way to sinful practices or false teaching, causing them to leave the fellowship and covenant of the church. This means firmly but lovingly confronting their sin—speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). The pastor leads out in discipline, whether *formative* (discipling), helping restore one who has lapsed into sin; or *formal* (corrective), following the pattern of Matthew 18:15–20 that aims to restore a wandering sheep and maintain the church's testimony.¹³ Some fall prey to false teaching, and so must be humbly, boldly confronted with the truth of God's Word (1 Tim. 4:1–6; 2 Tim. 2:14–19).

3. Do the Work of Exhorting and Admonishing: "Assist in the True Reformation" of Those in the Church Who Have Given Way to Grievous Sin, and Yet Remain in the Church¹⁴

This category may include those distancing themselves from hearing the truth or from fellowship in the body. It incorporates those that have damaged relationships with others in the church due to temper, wrong attitudes, bitterness, or a contrary spirit. Those engaged in immoral behavior, living unholy lives entrapped by the world, need reforming (repentance) in their behavior. If indeed true believers, Christ needs to be formed in them (Gal. 4:19). Bucer distinguishes this category from the former since they've remained in some part of the church without total abandonment or alienation. Yet their continuance in the church disrupts the unity and purity that should characterize the body of Christ (Eph. 4:13–5:14). Pastoral ministry directs them toward repentance and personal discipline as followers of Christ (2 Tim. 4:2).

4. Do the Work of Gentle Healing: Reestablish to Christian Strength and Health Those Persevering Yet Still Somewhat Spiritually Sick

Bucer includes in this category those fainthearted when facing difficulties, those slow to serve others, those who've grown careless in spiritual

11. Bucer, *Care of Souls*, 70–71.

12. Bucer, *Care of Souls*, 71.

13. See Andrew Davis, "The Practical Issues of Church Discipline," in Hammett and Merkle, *Those Who Must Give an Account*, 157–85. See Question 33 for more on church discipline.

14. Bucer, *Care of Souls*, 70–72.

disciplines, and “those who err in right understanding.”¹⁵ They’ve remained in the church, participated in the gatherings, made some effort toward perseverance, but they still remain spiritually unhealthy. Coming alongside them, partnering them with more mature believers, holding them accountable, providing them with good resources, and regularly encouraging them helps to reestablish these believers to spiritual health. Our churches have plenty fitting this category. They’re believers who love the church but need shepherding toward health and vitality. We can become frustrated as pastors, hoping they will do better. Some lack the constitution to respond as well as others. So, we must patiently labor with them until we see them, in turn, serving to help others walk with Christ.

5. Do the Work of Guarding the Flock: “Protect from All Offense and Falling Away and Continually Encourage in All Good Things Those Who Stay with the Flock in Christ’s Sheep-Pen without Grievously Sinning or Becoming Weak and Sick in This Christian Walk”¹⁶

These faithful members of the body press on in their spiritual walks, serve one another, participate in gospel work in the community and beyond, volunteer to assist with the work of ministry, and encourage their pastors in their work. Bucer reminds us that shepherds do not need to presume these members of the flock will manage their spiritual walks without the need of pastoral oversight. They must be watched, protected, and encouraged as much as the others. They need pastoral care, too.

The goal for pastoral ministry is to lead the congregation to fear God, believe the gospel, stay faithful to the body, and show diligence and keenness in living holy lives that give glory to Jesus Christ in all things.¹⁷

Four Specifics for Pastoral Ministry

“Pastors are generalists,” notes Laniak.¹⁸ They cover a broad range of responsibilities when exercising pastoral ministry. This sweep of responsibilities can frustrate pastors as they seek to shepherd the flock. Pastors sometimes feel stressed by their weakness in one area of ministry, or the ministry where they appear least competent seems to vie for more energy and time. Such is pastoral ministry. Laniak writes, “The task of shepherds is determined daily by the changing needs of the flock under their care.”¹⁹ Inevitably, pastors have strengths in some areas and weaknesses in others. That’s why we must follow

15. Bucer, *Care of Souls*, 72–73.

16. Bucer, *Care of Souls*, 70.

17. Bucer, *Care of Souls*, 176–81.

18. Laniak, *Shepherds*, 247.

19. Laniak, *Shepherds*, 247.

the pattern of plurality found in the NT church. With plurality, one's weakness will be compensated by the strength of a fellow elder/pastor.

We might offer numerous lists of specific responsibilities in pastoral ministry. However, four categories need to be operative in every pastor's work: feeding the Word, leading the flock, watching out for the body, and setting an example for others to follow.

1. Feed the Word

Teaching and preaching God's Word remains most basic *and* essential to the work of pastoral ministry. Generations come and go, but the need for hearing the exposition of God's Word never changes. Historically, great periods of spiritual awakening always come on the heels of renewed fervency for proclaiming God's Word.²⁰ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, whose twentieth-century pastoral ministry still impacts the evangelical world, wrote, "I would say without hesitation that the most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching; and as it is the greatest and the most urgent need in the Church, it is obviously the greatest need of the world also."²¹ The reason for the urgency of preaching, of course, has nothing to do with the need for more gifted speakers. We have plenty of them. Rather, we always live with the necessity of hearing God's Word.

Mark Dever and Paul Alexander agree: "The pastor's first responsibility is to feed the sheep on the Word of God (John 21:15–17; 2 Tim. 4:2). A shepherd simply cannot be faithful to his task if he doesn't feed his flock well (Ezek. 34:2–3, 13–14; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9)."²² We find the pattern of biblical proclamation throughout the book of Acts wherever the apostles and early members of the church went. Peter and John preached around the temple area and were arrested for their proclamation (Acts 3–4). Stephen became the church's first martyr after preaching to religious opponents, including Saul of Tarsus (Acts 7:1–8:3). Philip left Jerusalem due to persecution and ended up preaching the gospel from Samaria to Caesarea (Acts 8:4–40). Peter preached the gospel to Cornelius (Acts 10). Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel throughout ancient Asia Minor, and continued with new preaching partners into the next round of missionary expansion (Acts 13–14; 16–21). Paul regularly reinforced the centrality of the Word to the early churches (Rom. 1:1–17; 1 Cor. 1:18–2:5; Eph. 4:11–16; Col. 4:17; 2 Thess. 2:13).

20. That's illustrated, for example, in the preaching of the early fathers Augustine and Chrysostom; Luther, Calvin, Bucer, Knox, and Tyndale in the Great Reformation; and the Wesley brothers, Whitefield, and Edwards in the First Great Awakening.

21. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 40th anniv. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 17.

22. Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 94.

Some appear to think the church needs more pop wisdom, personal motivation, and inspiration instead of the hard work of laboring in the Word week after week. Dever and Alexander respond: “A man may have a charismatic personality; he may be a gifted administrator and a silken orator; he may be armed with an impressive program; he may even have the people skills of a politician and the empathic listening skills of a counselor; but he will starve the sheep if he cannot feed the people of God on the Word of God.”²³

What kind of preaching is needed? John Stott insisted, if preaching “is to be authentically Christian it must be expository.”²⁴ In nineteenth-century Cambridge, Charles Simeon’s expositions affected an entire generation. His conviction on expository preaching expressed his pastoral aim: “My endeavor is to bring out of Scripture what is there, and not to thrust in what I think might be there. I have a great jealousy on this head; never to speak more or less than I believe to be the mind of the Spirit in the passage I am expounding.”²⁵ With Simeon’s conviction, effective pastoral ministry gives primary focus to feeding the flock God’s Word.

2. Lead the Flock

We don’t find elders as an office used in Hebrews,²⁶ but we do find that biblical writer implying the shepherding work of elders with the phrase “those leading you” (*hegeomai*, Heb. 13:7, 17, my trans.). The leaders are accountable to the Chief Shepherd and must lead the flock in a way that profits the flock’s spiritual lives and guards them from spiritual dangers. Pastors lead the flock into spiritual maturity, unity in the faith, doctrinal stability, and faithful life in the body (Eph. 4:11–16). As the Good Shepherd does, they lead the flock into green pastures and still waters for the feeding, meditating, and refreshing experience of God’s Word (Ps. 23). They lead the church in worship, service, and organizing for mission (1 Tim. 4:13; Rom. 12:9–13; Matt. 28:18–20).

Churches gather to worship, then scatter to serve and do mission. But who will lead them in that effort? Those in covenant with one another in the local church multiply their ministries as they serve together under the leadership of thoughtful pastors. Leadership includes participation, setting an example for others to follow.

23. Dever and Alexander, *Deliberate Church*, 94.

24. John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 135.

25. H. C. G. Moule, *Charles Simeon* (London: Methuen, 1892), 97, quoted by David Helm, *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God’s Word Today*, 9Marks Building Healthy Churches (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 12.

26. The same word translated as elders in 1 Timothy 3:17 and Titus 1:5, πρεσβύτερος, is used in Hebrews 11:2, not for a church office but for “men of old” (NASB).

3. *Protect the Body*

Pastors guard their flocks from false teaching; divisive people; subtleties of novel but unbiblical ideas; patterns of sin, laziness, and neglect; and subversive, ungodly leaders (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 4:1–8, 16; 2 Tim. 2:14–19, 23–26; 4:14–15; Titus 3:9–11; 1 Peter 2:11–12; 2 John 7–11; 3 John 9–10).

Dever and Alexander explain that most of those seeking to subvert do so by twisting the truth of Scripture (Acts 20:28–31): “Sometimes we must be the ones who know how to defuse a potentially divisive situation. Other times we are called to engage in doctrinal battle over significant issues—those that affect the Gospel and the security of the church in it.”²⁷ On those occasions, action must be taken to protect the flock.

Many years ago, a man visited our church, appearing to be very knowledgeable in God’s Word. But the more some of our elders and I listened to him, the more we realized he held aberrant, unorthodox views on the person of Christ. Together, we immediately took action to confront and deny him any public access to spread his views in the church. He soon left to look for easier prey, hoping to find elders who were not guarding the flock.

4. *Set an Example*

Pastors must guard their spiritual walks, marriages, finances, and all areas that might threaten their integrity to lead God’s people. Paul told Timothy, “Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. . . . Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching” (1 Tim. 4:12, 16). Look out for the details in your life and doctrine. Look at the way you talk, live, care for others, and exemplify a holy life. The word translated “pay close attention to” (*epechō*) is the same word Luke used of the man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple who “fixed his attention” on Peter and John.²⁸ That expresses the idea well. An unexamined, unwatched life will not stand for long in the face of inward temptation and external assaults.

Recognizing inherent weaknesses that lure us into sin, lack of discipline, distractions, and self-centeredness, pastors must daily confess sin, live in the fullness and power of the Spirit, live at the cross in dying to sin, and grow in trust and confidence in the Lord (Luke 9:23; Rom. 6:1–19; 2 Cor. 5:6–10; Eph. 4:17–5:14; 5:15–18; 1 John 1:9). Pastors must discern whether they’re serving others in the body or just hiding behind ministerial life (Gal. 6:1–2).

Pastors must seek to “learn what is pleasing to the Lord,” walking in faithfulness and being exemplary in conduct, love, service, generosity, and devotedness to Christ and his body (Eph. 5:10).

27. Dever and Alexander, *Deliberate Church*, 94–95.

28. BDAG, ἐπέχω, 362.

Summary

While trying to provide everything for Christ's lambs, as Bucer exhorted in his description of pastoral ministry, we realize how important plurality in pastoral work will be to faithfully teach, lead, guard, and set an example for the flock. Our responsibilities involve evangelizing the unbelieving, seeking to restore the lapsed and fallen, and faithfully shepherding those regularly involved with the body. Just as no two churches are alike, so too will the areas of focus and emphasis in pastoral ministry differ from church to church. Yet those same four areas of service—Word, leadership, protection, and example—must be evident in every church's pastoral ministry.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What does Laniak mean by stating, "Pastors are generalists"?
2. How does the word "watchfulness" encapsulate the whole of pastoral ministry?
3. What five main tasks did Bucer identify in pastoral ministry?
4. Why must *feeding the flock* be primary in pastoral ministry?
5. What must pastors be on guard against on behalf of the body?

QUESTION 3

What Essential Qualities Must Be Present in a Christian Pastor?

Without exaggerating, character is everything when it comes to the pastor/elder. It's not that gifts, abilities, training, and experience play no part in the work of the Christian pastor. Rather, without godly character, all gifts and abilities mean nothing. Without evidence of the character described in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9, a pastor exercises his ministry as a hypocrite, causing far more harm than good for the body of Christ.

Amazingly, aside from the requirement to teach and the restriction on being a new convert (1 Tim. 3:2, 6; Titus 1:9), Paul does not ask for anything that shouldn't be present in any Christian. Above reproach, temperate, prudent, hospitable, gentle, peaceable—all of these characteristics picture the regenerate person walking with the Lord, serving others, and demonstrating the effects of the gospel. Faithfulness to the marriage vows, good home management, self-control, eschewing addictions, and not bullying others ought to be the norm for followers of Christ. As D. A. Carson states, “The most remarkable thing about these characteristics is that there is nothing remarkable about them.”¹

So why does Paul detail the kind of character needed in elders/pastors? First, pastors need to live like those redeemed by Christ. They are Christians before they are pastors. No amount of oratorical, leadership, or administrative skills can compensate for a lack of godly character. Second, they must be models for other believers to follow. Peter wrote that elders need “to be examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3). One can imagine that new Christians, living without any previous example of a godly Christian life, particularly needed

1. D. A. Carson, at a joint Sunday school gathering, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC, as reported to me in a conversation with Mark Dever and Matt Schmucker, who were present.

the model of faithful elders living before them as “an example of those who believe” (1 Tim. 4:12). Today, believers who are confused by the messages of a post-Christian world still need pastoral examples to follow. Therefore, focusing on godly character precedes shepherding responsibilities.

To consider the essential qualities of pastors, we will look at Paul’s prescriptive outline to Titus for elders’ character (Titus 1:5–9), interspersed with some of the similar qualities listed in 1 Timothy 3:1–7.

The character qualities Paul lists to Timothy and Titus overlap, with a few exceptions,² most notably, the Titus list says nothing about the elder not being a new convert (1 Tim. 3:7). Presumably, with most Cretan converts as new believers, Paul did not include the same requirement he made with Timothy at the longer established Ephesian church.³ We will follow Paul’s list to Titus, breaking it into four categories to think on necessary character qualities for pastors: examples at home, examples in personal conduct, examples in relationships, and examples in corporate life.

First-generation Cretan Christians had little idea of what it meant to live like Christians. They had “liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons” as examples (Titus 1:12). So how would these believers understand how to treat families, employers, employees, slaves, masters, and fellow believers? Paul offered the key for elders living as examples of Christ’s disciples: the pastors must have a godly home life.

Examples at Home

The statement “the husband of one wife” or, better, “a one-woman man” (*mias gynaikos anēr*, Titus 1:6) shows the pastor’s singular devotedness to his wife. Debates on whether Paul meant the elder (a) must be married, (b) cannot be divorced and remarried, or (c) cannot be a polygamist miss the major point that the pastor/elder must be “a one-woman man.”⁴ His faithfulness to love his wife as Christ loves the church, treating her with gentleness, kindness, and sacrificial love, proclaims the power of the gospel in the marriage relationship (Eph. 5:22–33).

2. For a helpful chart comparing Timothy and Titus, see Benjamin L. Merkle, *Forty Questions About Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2008), 110.

3. For more consideration on why Paul left off the “not a new convert” requirement with Titus, with implications in developing pastoral leaders in hard places, see Phil A. Newton and Matt Schmucker, *Elders in the Life of the Church: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2014), 233–40; see also Benjamin L. Merkle, “Ecclesiology in the Pastoral Epistles,” in *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul’s Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, eds. Andreas Köstenberger and Terry Wilder (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 185.

4. See Merkle, *Forty Questions About Elders and Deacons*, 124–29. If a pastor/elder shows unfaithfulness to his wife, then he faces immediate disqualification in his office since the marriage relationship is to model Christ and the church, as described in Ephesians 5:22–33. See a similar position in John. S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019), 195–97.

He's devoted to his children as well. His children recognize his faith in Christ as he lives out the gospel in his home (Titus 1:6). There's debate on the meaning of the adjective modifying "children," that is, "children who believe" (*tekna echōn pista*). The Pastoral Epistles, most naturally and prominently, use it as "faithful" ("having faithful children," lit.). Andreas Köstenberger explains *faithful* "probably means 'obedient and submissive to their father's orders' (cf. 1 Tim. 3:11; 2 Tim. 2:2, 13)."⁵ John Piper concurs: "So the idea seems to be of children who are well bred, orderly, generally obedient, responsible, and reliable."⁶ Brian Chapell notes, "We are not necessarily looking at the beliefs and actions of one child but at the character of the family as a whole." The translation of *faithful* rather than *believing* "better communicates the intended meaning that our assessment is to be based on observations of children's conduct and convictions made over time, not on isolated statements or actions."⁷

This interpretation finds further confirmation in Paul's explanatory note, "not accused of dissipation or rebellion" (Titus 1:6). Köstenberger remarks, "Paul isn't referring to occasional disobedience but deep-seated rebellion against parental authority."⁸ In other words, they are not out of control. Their father exercises judicious oversight, carrying out teaching, training, instruction, and, as necessary, corrective discipline. Their faithfulness is shown by the way they respond to his fatherly leadership.

Examples in Personal Conduct

"Above reproach" is the umbrella characteristic of an elder (Titus 1:6; 1 Tim. 3:2). It controls the whole of his life. Paul does not call for perfection, or else no one could ever serve as an elder. But he does mean that pastors will be conscientious about the way they conduct their lives. They seek to make sure they have no dangling areas to dishonor Christ or detract from the gospel. They have no reason to constantly cover up or lie about their behavior. What you see in them at church will be the same at home, at work, in the community, and even when no one watches them. Elders lead by demonstrating Christian character, becoming an example for all the church (Heb. 13:7).

What does it look like to be "above reproach"? Paul fills this out by providing some examples.

5. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Commentary on 1–2 Timothy and Titus*, BTCP (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2017), 314.

6. John Piper, "Biblical Eldership: Shepherd the Flock of God among You," *Desiring God* (website), Sermons, May 1, 1999, sec. 8, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/biblical-eldership-session-1#Qualifications>.

7. R. Kent Hughes and Brian Chapell, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*, PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 296–97.

8. Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy and Titus*, 314.

(a) “Not self-willed” (Titus 1:7): The pastor is not obstinate and arrogant in the way he acts, refusing to live as though the world revolves around him. He avoids the unteachable spirit of one using rather than serving others and refuses to trample over others to achieve his own desires.

(b) “Not quick-tempered” (Titus 1:7): The pastor is not hotheaded or short-fused. Relationships matter to him, so he demonstrates patience and longsuffering with others.

(c) “Not addicted to wine” (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim. 3:3): On the island of Crete, the prominent Dionysian cult included drunkenness as part of its worship. These Christian leaders were never to be mistaken for leaders in the Dionysus cult. Self-control and restraint in their appetites distinguishes them.

(d) “Not pugnacious” (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim. 3:3): Pastors are not to be bullies or given to fighting or heavy-handedness. Their self-control does not quickly seek to defend self, or battle to get the last word in a tense conversation. Here we see the example of Christ: “while being reviled, He did not revile in return” (1 Peter 2:23).

(e) “Not fond of sordid gain” (Titus 1:7; cf. “free from the love of money,” 1 Tim. 3:3; 1 Peter 5:2): Pastors must guard themselves in the areas of covetousness and greed. They demonstrate a strong work ethic yet refuse to gain things indiscreetly or dishonestly or through crass manipulation.

Examples in Relationships

In one sense, everything in Titus 1:7–8 has to do with both personal behavior and relationships. But the characteristics of Titus 1:8 particularly exemplify faithful relationships.

(a) “Hospitable” (Titus 1:8; 1 Tim. 3:2): Rather than being a bully or using people for selfish gain, the pastor practices hospitality. The word literally means “love for strangers” or “love for foreigners.” He willingly opens his home to others. Two of the elders at my church have the reputation for opening their homes so often that we’ve thought of putting “Bed & Breakfast” signs at their doors. Hospitality befits Christian character (Rom. 12:13).

(b) “Loving what is good” (Titus 1:8): Some translate this phrase as loving those who are good or loving good things. More pointedly, elders must have an affinity for good rather than dark, evil, or questionable things. That should be evident in what they read or watch or discuss. It “denotes devotion to all

that is best.”⁹ That also involves how they spend their time and resources, as well as what they seek in relationships with others.

(c) “Sensible” (Titus 1:8): The pastor keeps his head about him; that is, he disciplines his life with an aim toward wisdom. The NASB translates the same word in 1 Timothy 3:2 as “prudent” (*sōphrona*), which we think of as “acting wisely.” Paul uses the word in Titus 2:2, 5, and 6 to imply one engaging his mind, thinking soberly with a heart of wisdom, and seeking to speak or act wisely.

(d) “Just” (Titus 1:8): The pastor has a keen sensitivity to upholding right standards of conduct and honoring God’s laws. He values integrity. He treats all in the same conscientious way, regardless of a person’s status in life, level of involvement in the church, or contribution to the overall ministry.

(e) “Devout” (Titus 1:8): Pastors take seriously personal piety. While sometimes construed negatively, it simply means one is concerned to live a holy, devoted life to Christ as his Lord in all things. Holiness means something to him (1 Peter 1:13–16).

(f) “Self-controlled” (Titus 1:8): As a word meaning living under “divine restraint,” or living a disciplined life, it gives a clear picture of a life that dies to self or *mortifies* the flesh (Luke 9:23; Rom. 6:6). No careless word or act confuses his testimony as a follower of Christ. It means “having one’s emotions, impulses, or desires under control.”¹⁰ Rather than giving way to folly, foolish living, sensual desires, or thoughtless language, pastors must rein in the natural impulses of the flesh.

Examples in Corporate Life

The primary distinguishing mark between elders and deacons is that the former must be “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2).¹¹ While two of the deacon prototypes,¹² Stephen and Philip, gave clear evidence of teaching and preaching gifts (Acts 6–8), Paul lays no mandate on deacons for teaching (1 Tim. 3:8–13). They must hold “to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.” Mounce explains, “and as that gospel works its way out in their lives, their consciences should not condemn them of sin.”¹³

9. *LEKENT*, 508.

10. BDAG, ἐγκρατής, 274.

11. The distinction “able to teach” does not require elders to preach, although some do (e.g., 1 Tim. 5:17).

12. Merkle, *Forty Questions About Elders and Deacons*, 227–29.

13. William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC 46 (Waco, TX: Nelson, 2000), 199.

But pastors hold the distinct priority of proclaiming God's Word. The primary place the congregation sees a pastor will be in the ministry of teaching and preaching. In the corporate setting, the congregation finds a critical, threefold example shown by faithful pastors.

(1) Pastors demonstrate to the congregation what it means to be diligent students of God's Word, who give careful attention to properly interpreting and applying it. Their example spills over into the way that the congregation learns to read, study, interpret, and apply God's Word. The ability to teach (1 Tim. 3:2) and to exhort in sound doctrine (Titus 1:9), models the appropriate way of reading and applying the Word in daily life. Rather than church members thinking it permissible to read their own interpretations and applications into the Word, faithful pastors, week after week, expose the congregation to sound interpretations leading to healthy applications of biblical doctrine.

(2) Pastors committed to teaching sound doctrine instill a love of good doctrine in the members of their congregations (Titus 1:9). Failing to grow up hearing sound doctrine taught from the pulpit left me jaundiced. Thank God, that changed as I began to study God's Word, realizing it is a lively doctrinal book (2 Tim. 4:1–4). When pastors regularly expound God's Word and explain the doctrines in the biblical text, then the church starts to grasp the importance of doctrine as foundational to the whole of the Christian life. They begin to see that any talk of the person and work of Christ, sin, salvation, judgment, heaven, the Holy Spirit, and the church requires consideration of biblical doctrine. When they witness their pastors' excitement in preaching sound doctrine, it becomes wonderfully contagious in the congregation, as they see the bigger picture of God's Word and how doctrine connects every detail.

(3) Pastors' ability to defend the faith and "refute those who contradict" God's Word (Titus 1:9) will challenge and inspire members of the congregation to better understand their Bibles. It happens regularly that as church members face false teaching and receive help from their pastors in being able to give a faithful answer, they grow in hungering to know and apply the Word. Pastors modeling clarity in biblical interpretation, appropriately responding to those trying to contradict the faith, will likely have members asking the pastors to teach them how to do the same. It provides a wonderful opportunity to disciple the body in properly handling God's Word, not as a tool to win wars but as the message of truth that changes lives.

Summary

The apostle made clear, as apostolic delegates Timothy and Titus led congregations toward elder plurality, that they were to give attention to character above all else in candidates for the office. With the modern tendency of some churches just to look for a nice man or pleasant mannerisms or a loaded

ministry résumé, Paul would have nothing of that. Character stands tall when considering those shepherding Christ's flock.

Yet in the character qualities, other than teaching and not being a new convert, Paul simply called for pastors to live like true disciples of Jesus Christ. If pastors remember they are first Christians and church members it will keep them focused on living holy lives, building relationships, and setting an example for the church as believers. Apart from this kind of intentional faithfulness as disciples, men have no warrant to serve as pastors of Christian churches.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why should pastors pay attention to character in their lives?
2. What kind of character issues does Paul raise about marriage and family in Titus 1?
3. How does “above reproach” serve as an *umbrella* term in personal conduct for pastors?
4. What does Paul mean when calling for elders to exercise “self-control”?
5. How does the preaching and teaching of pastors affect the members of their congregations?