

CHAPTER 2



the pastor as shepherd

Serving the Lord as a pastor is unlike any other calling. It is not more important than any other calling, just different. We can attest that while pastors experience some of the greatest pains and sorrows one will ever know in this life, we also get to experience some of the greatest joys! The joy of seeing the lost come to saving faith in Christ. The witnessing of marriages that appeared broken beyond repair being restored by the grace of God. The weekly blessing of leading God's people in the corporate worship of our great King and Savior. The gift of being able to preach and teach God's Word as we seek to make disciples of Jesus. We could go on and on. There are so many joys we as pastors get to experience. And we are humbled and grateful for each of them.

Without question, one of the greatest joys and privileges any pastor gets to experience is coming alongside children as they grow and mature in Christ. To play a role in their spiritual growth and formation from the time they learn to walk, through their elementary and teenage years, to the day when

they graduate from high school, there is nothing quite like the role a pastor plays in shepherding these young souls.

PASTORS' FAILURE TO SHEPHERD CHILDREN

Of course, while the opportunity for pastors to invest in and shepherd children and young people is before them, we live in a day where many pastors, knowingly or unknowingly, have abdicated this responsibility. There are many different reasons for this, but let's name just a few.

#1. Inadequate Training and Preparation

While most seminaries do an excellent job equipping pastors in the areas of theology, Biblical studies, and preaching, very few require courses on ministering to children and the relationship a pastor should have with the kids in their church. As a result, most pastors simply haven't been trained to develop a shepherding strategy for the children of their congregation.

#2. The Rise of Specialized Children's Ministries

Over the past several decades, we have seen massive growth in specialized children's ministries. Conferences, books and resources, seminary-level degree programs, learning cohorts, and practical training events of various kinds have aided the growth of children's ministry, including the hiring of many part-time or full-time children's ministry workers. While there is much to be thankful for with this growing emphasis on children's ministry, the reality is that children's ministry workers are not responsible for shepherding children by themselves. Children

need pastors in their life. Sadly, in many church contexts, pastors have delegated their God-given shepherding role in the lives of children almost entirely to those leading the children's ministry.

#3. Busyness

Pastors are busy. They are really busy. Between the flood of emails and phone calls, weekly counseling sessions, sermons that need to be prepared, classes that need to be taught, meetings that need to be led, and personal and family relationships that need time and attention, pastors are very busy. And the reality is that because pastors carry a very heavy load, pursuing shepherding relationships with the children of their church can seem almost impossible. It takes effort and sacrifice to prioritize a pastor's ministry to kids.

#4. Insecurity

One of the realities we don't talk about enough is how many pastors feel a sense of insecurity when it comes to ministering to children. There are many reasons for this. It could be that as we age, we feel "out of touch" with kids and therefore our effectiveness is limited. For others, especially those who have gifted leaders ministering effectively to the children of the congregation, a pastor can question whether they really "bring anything to the table." For still others, they feel unqualified because they have a sense of failure with their own children.

Whatever the source of insecurity might be, a pastor must remember that the grace of God in the gospel is more than sufficient to give them what they need to carry out the shepherd-

ing ministry. None of us is perfect. We have all failed as parents, pastors, and leaders. And yet this is the good news: In our failure and weakness, He is our strength. Praise the Lord, this will never change. We have all we need in Jesus.

Considering these four reasons, it is appropriate to remember the role and responsibility of a pastor in the local church. Understanding and living in God's vision for the pastoral office will help ministers of the gospel more effectively love and lead children in the way of Jesus.

WHAT EXACTLY IS A PASTOR AND WHAT ARE THEY CALLED TO DO?

Throughout Scripture, we see God's people consistently referred to as sheep and pastors as shepherds. More specifically, pastors are called to be under-shepherds of the Good Shepherd, God himself. This is a huge responsibility and not to be taken lightly. Scripture lays out four functions that pastors must fulfill as they minister to God's people. Let's consider each of these briefly.

Biblical Function #1: The Shepherd-Pastor KNOWS the Flock

The most basic responsibility of a pastor is to know his sheep. While it may seem obvious, before a shepherd can provide proper care, "he must know the identification of the sheep for whom he is responsible. Jesus not only identifies himself as the good shepherd but also says, 'I know my sheep and my sheep know me' (Jn. 10:14)."³⁷ In the same way, a pastor must identify and know their sheep. David Dickson captures the heart of

knowing the sheep when he describes the relationship between faithful, loving pastors and the individuals under their care:

He must be acquainted with them all, old and young, their history, their occupations, their habits, their ways of thinking. They and their children should be their personal friends, so that they naturally turn to him as to one on whom they can depend as a kind and sympathizing friend and a faithful counselor.³⁸

We love that vision of what a pastor looks like in relation to their people and their children in particular! He is to know them well and guide them as a kind and sympathizing friend and a faithful counselor. These are the types of pastors each of us needs in our lives! It is the responsibility of the shepherd to know the flock, one sheep at a time. It is their responsibility to pursue and engage their people in a personal way on a regular basis. Shepherds are attentive to the sheep, knowing their spiritual, emotional, and physical condition so that they can serve, encourage, edify, and minister in an effective manner.

Biblical Function #2: The Shepherd-Pastor FEEDS the Flock

A second Biblical function of pastors is to feed the flock. Sheep rely on the shepherd for food. It's the shepherd's job to feed them the food they need to grow. In John 21:15, Jesus lays out the calling he places on spiritual leaders in the church: "When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.'" These words apply to every pastor in every church. As those who have been called by God to lead His people, a pastor's love

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for Christ will be made evident in the way that he faithfully feeds the Lord's sheep.

Every pastor must understand that sheep cannot find pastures on their own. Sheep have a difficult time discerning the difference between healthy food and poisonous weeds. This is particularly true of children and young people. Sheep need a shepherd to help them find healthy food to nourish them. In this way, God's people need pastors who will teach them rightly, helping them find nourishment for their souls in God's Word.

Biblical Function #3: The Shepherd-Pastor LEADS the Flock

Another responsibility of a pastor is to lead the sheep entrusted to their care. Sheep need to be led, and God's will is that his flock would be led by shepherds who have a heart that reflects his own heart. In Jeremiah 3:15, God says, "I will give you shepherds who are loyal to me (shepherds according to my heart), and they will shepherd you with knowledge and skill." In this verse, God promises the people of Israel that he will send loving shepherds who will guide them with a tender and loving yet firm heart.

One of the primary reasons leadership is a key function of every pastor is that without it, sheep will wander. In Zechariah 10:2, the prophet writes, "For the idols speak falsehood, and the diviners see illusions; they relate empty dreams and offer empty comfort. Therefore the people wander like sheep; they suffer affliction because there is no shepherd." This can easily happen when pastors fail to lead their people well. Sheep need a

mindful, attentive shepherd looking over them, or they will easily drift onto dangerous paths that bring harm. God's people need to be led. From the nursery to the nursing home, God's people need shepherd-pastors who will guide them and lead them in the ways of Jesus and God's Word, or they will wander away from the life-giving pastures of God's truth and into life-destroying pastures of deceit and darkness that lead to death.

***Biblical Function #4:
The Shepherd-Pastor PROTECTS the Flock***

Along with knowing, feeding, and leading the flock, pastors must also protect the flock. Sheep are in constant need of protection. Consider Acts 20:28-30:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Men will rise up even from your own number and distort the truth to lure the disciples into following them.

Sheep cannot protect themselves, and they won't work together to protect each other. They will allow a wolf to come and kill. In the same way, there will be people inside the church who seek to cause division, teach false doctrine, or foster sin. These individuals are wolves who work to destroy the flock, which is why the spiritual protection of pastors is so vital.

The bottom line is that Biblical, qualified pastors are called to shepherd God's people. The responsibilities of knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting the flock are the core of a pastor's calling.

A Quick Word... on “Macro” vs. “Micro” Shepherding

There are two levels of pastoral care when shepherding a congregation. Timothy Witmer refers to these as “macro” level and “micro.”³⁹ Here is a brief overview of each.

Macro-Level

This is the “congregational” level of shepherding. Macro-level shepherding is concerned with knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting the congregation as a whole. Macro-level shepherding responsibilities include such things as:

- ☐ Meaningful church membership process
- ☐ Preaching (public ministry of the Word)
- ☐ Corporate worship (including Baptism and the Lord’s Supper)
- ☐ Casting church-wide vision
- ☐ Carrying out a clear discipleship strategy
- ☐ Regularly scheduled members’ meetings
- ☐ Helping the congregation identify false teaching
- ☐ Church discipline process

Micro-Level

This is the “personal” level of shepherding. Micro-level shepherding is concerned with knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting the individuals that make up a congregation. Micro-level shepherding responsibilities include

- ☐ Personal relationships with individuals
- ☐ Pastors know each sheep under their care

- ☐ Discipleship
- ☐ Praying for each member individually
- ☐ Personal, pastoral counseling and care
- ☐ Providing Biblical teaching and counsel for life decisions
- ☐ Protecting individuals through private warning and loving correction
- ☐ Church discipline process

While many churches carry out macro-level shepherding well, micro-level shepherding is often a challenge because it takes a great deal of time, energy, and intentionality. However, the pastoral calling is not to know, feed, lead, and protect an impersonal “mass” of people but to know, care for, love, and shepherd individuals. This includes the children of the church. Both macro- and micro-level shepherding is crucial to the health of any congregation and every disciple of Jesus, young or old.

What will these two levels of shepherding care look like in congregations, specifically when it comes to shepherding children?

STRATEGIES FOR KNOWING THE FLOCK

The foundational responsibility of the pastor is to know his flock. As shepherds, it’s our responsibility to get to know our flock on a personal level, one sheep at a time, including children. This relationship is unique. There is nothing quite like the ongoing, committed, loving relationship between a shepherd and the sheep under his care. This is why it is critical for pastors to establish regular personal contact with the children in their congregation.

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So, let's get practical. What does it look like—on a week-by-week, day-by-day basis—to know, feed, lead, and protect God's people, particularly children, as a pastor? Let's consider several strategies.

#1. Keep Track of Weekly Worship Attendance for Children and Their Parents

Depending on the size of the church, attendance tracking methods can vary. In some churches, people pass around and sign some kind of attendance packet or sheet. This is usually included as part of the actual worship service, often during announcements or the offering time. In other churches, it is easier to have a few leaders or volunteers stand at the back of the sanctuary or meeting space and take attendance. At our church, this is the method we use: We have two individuals take attendance from the back of our sanctuary each week. While we use a Google Doc now, in the early years, when our church was around 30-50 people, we simply used a hand-written spreadsheet. However, the church does it, keeping weekly attendance for children and their parents is a crucial first step in the shepherding plan. Knowing who was absent from Sunday worship will allow shepherds to check in the following week and let families know they were missed. It also helps to make sure children do not slip through the cracks without being noticed.

#2. Make Contact with Every Child and Their Parents on Your Shepherding Team at Least Once a Month

We will discuss shepherding teams in chapter 4, but at this point, we want to stress that pastors must intentionally contact

the children and parents on their shepherding team consistently. A minimum of once a month is a realistic goal for this. Contact could be a brief check-in conversation at church on a Sunday morning, a phone call to hear how they are doing and prayer requests, a visit to a family's home, a handwritten note of encouragement, or sharing a meal together. Making contact with those under the pastor's care can look different. The key is consistently and intentionally reaching out and staying connected.

#3. Get to Know Each Child on a Personal Level

Regardless of the size of the church and the number of children in the congregation, the pastor should make every effort to get to know the kids on a personal level. If it is a smaller church, the pastor may be able to know every child in the church personally. If it is a larger church, they may need to focus on a manageable number of kids they can know and care for, sharing the shepherding load with other pastor-elders. When we talk about knowing each child on a personal level, we have three specific aspects in mind.

(1) Know Their Name and Basic Info

While it may seem very simple, there are few things as powerful as knowing and then using someone else's name. I (Mark) can remember as a little kid how much it meant to me when my pastor would call me by name. I couldn't believe he actually knew who I was! This should be the norm when it comes to the relationship between pastors and children in a congregation. Pastors must know kids' names and then use their names every

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time they see them. Of course, this takes work and intentionality, but it is worth it.

Along with knowing the names of the children in the church, pastors should know basic information about each child. Information like

- ☐ How old are they and what grade are they in?
- ☐ Where do they live?
- ☐ What school do they go to?
- ☐ How many brothers and sisters do they have?
- ☐ How long has their family lived in this community?⁴⁰

This type of basic information helps pastors not only know children better shepherd them more effectively as well.

(2) Know What They Enjoy

One of the ways pastors can build a deeper relationship with the children in their church is by knowing some of the things that they enjoy. Whether it is playing sports, playing an instrument, drawing pictures, or eating at a particular restaurant, knowing specific things that kids enjoy helps a pastor to better connect with them and build trust over time.

One of the most powerful things pastors can do is attend sporting events or school activities that children in the church are involved with. The parents of the child will be grateful that the pastor cares enough to show up and support their son or daughter, but the child will be blown away! What a cool thing that their pastor would come just to see them. This is a simple, tangible way to show that the pastor cares deeply for kids in the

church. Pastors can simply show up and encourage them like crazy!

(3) Know Where They Are Spiritually

Pastors want to do the very best they can to have the spiritual pulse on every individual in their congregation. This includes the children. Part of shepherding children well is knowing, with the help of their parents, where a child is spiritually:

- ☐ Do they love Jesus?
- ☐ Have they surrendered their life to him?
- ☐ Have they been baptized?
- ☐ Do they struggle with doubt?
- ☐ What things are hindering their spiritual growth at this stage in their life?
- ☐ What types of things do they want to learn more about when it comes to Jesus, God, or the Bible?
- ☐ What do they need from me as their pastor?

These are the types of questions that will help a pastor better understand where a child is spiritually. It will also help the pastor more effectively shepherd these children and their families toward greater maturity in Christ.

Practically, this is why we would recommend that pastors regularly teach some kind of Bible study or baptism/basics of the faith class to the children of their church. There is great wisdom in building a learning environment into the yearly rhythm of a church where a pastor can connect with kids to encourage them, teach them, laugh with them, and get a more accurate assessment of where each child is spiritually. This type of class can look different depending on the size of the congregation and

the ages of the kids. Whatever it looks like, pastors must find ways to teach with the children under their care. And this should be a joy and delight, never a burden!

STRATEGIES FOR FEEDING THE FLOCK

God's people need nourishment for their souls. For this reason, they need shepherds who will feed them from the Word of God. While as pastors we must work hard to know our people and their needs on a personal level, knowing the flock leads us to take whatever steps necessary to feed them. This includes the 9-month-old all the way up to the 90-year-old. Pastors should consider the following feeding strategies.

#1. Making Weekly Corporate Worship a Top Priority for Your Congregation, Including Children

For the majority of Christians throughout the history of the church, gathering with other believers in their congregation for weekly worship was non-negotiable. Sitting under the preaching of the Word, singing songs of praise, offering prayers of thanksgiving and supplication, giving tithes and offerings, celebrating the Lord's Supper, and baptism were viewed as crucial components to ongoing sanctification in the Lord. These were all experienced in a unique way in the corporate weekly worship gathering.

Sadly, we now live in a day where many self-professing Christians no longer prioritize congregational worship. For many, the lure of weekend skiing in the mountains, time on the beach, or a child's soccer schedule often hijacks a family's commitment to worship with their congregation on a weekly basis.

By God's grace and power, pastors and leaders must work to create a culture in their churches where worshipping together every Sunday is a high value, a culture where people, including children, understand that the worship gathering is critical to their spiritual growth, a culture where weekly worship is not seen as one option of many for how to spend a Sunday morning but as *the* option for one who desires to truly mature as a disciple of Jesus.

Of course, no family is going to be able to make it to worship every week. It is understandable that there will be conflicts of different kinds throughout the year. That is to be expected. However, the point is that Sundays missed will be the exception, not the rule. If we are to help our children become adults who prioritize weekly worship with their own families in the future, it must be prioritized, modeled, and celebrated in their lives from the time they are very young. Pastors have an important role in helping their people make the worship gathering a high value.

**A Quick Word...
on Making Children Feel Welcome
in the Worship Gathering**

One of the challenges many parents and grandparents have is helping their children get the most out of the church worship service. Megan Hill is exactly right when she says,

For families with kids, Sunday mornings can be a theater for spiritual drama. Whether you have toddlers who scream that their church shoes pinch or teenagers who

slouch out the door 15 minutes late, it's not easy to get to church. And the struggle doesn't necessarily stop once you're in the car. Kids often grumble about their Sunday school classes, complain about fellowship time, mumble through hymns, and squirm through the sermon. Their objections are many and vocal: too long, too quiet, too awkward, too boring. Sometimes, our kids just don't like going to church. As a grown-up church kid who is now the mom of a toddler and a teenager (plus two kids in between), I'm all too familiar with this hurdle. And I'm convinced it's worth overcoming."⁴¹

Indeed, it is worth overcoming! The question is how can pastors help parents and children get the most out of the corporate worship gathering so that it is a positive, spiritually enriching experience for the whole family? Here a few ideas:

Coach parents on how to prepare their kids for what to expect in worship the days leading up to Sunday. Help parents set and communicate expectations for their kids as well as the joy and privilege they have to worship God with their church family!

For little ones, create a "worship bag" with a notebook and a small amount of quiet activities that are special for Sunday mornings.

Encourage kids to bring their Bibles and look up verses that are mentioned in the sermon.

Look for ways to integrate children into the worship service. Perhaps they can help with music, reading Scripture, collecting the offering, greeting folks as they arrive, and more. Come up with creative ways to involve kids as part of your church's vision to raise up the next generation of leaders.

Encourage families to sit near the front of the sanctuary so that parents can explain to their kids what is happen-

ing throughout the worship service. This can help kids stay engaged with all that is happening, plus it is a great teaching opportunity each week.

Help children learn how to take sermon notes. It might be helpful to share the following questions to help direct parents and kids as they listen to the sermon:

- ☐ What does the passage say about God?
- ☐ What does the passage say about people?
- ☐ What does God want me to understand or think about?
- ☐ What does God want me to believe?
- ☐ What does God want me to desire?
- ☐ What does God want me to do?

Encourage parents and children to discuss things they heard and learned from the sermon later in the day or week.

#2: Connecting Children to Appropriate Educational and Learning Opportunities

A good shepherd will do whatever it takes to make sure the sheep under their care get the food they need to strengthen and sustain them. This is our responsibility as pastors. One of the ongoing ways we do this is by helping children get plugged into environments where they can grow. In other words, one of our feeding roles is to connect kids to appropriate small groups, Bible studies, Sunday School classes, and other educational and learning opportunities.

To do this well, we must be proactive in helping each child get connected to what they need rather than waiting and expecting their parents to figure it out completely on their own. Yes, parents must take the initiative to help their child take advantage of different growth opportunities offered in the church, but as shepherd-pastors, we must assist them in this. A good shepherd will do whatever it takes to help the sheep be fed.

#3. Providing Helpful Resources for Home Discipleship

God has given us homes to be a laboratory for the sanctification of our souls. However, many parents in our churches feel ill-equipped to make intentional family discipleship a priority. The parents have the desire, but they lack the tools and strategies. This is where pastors must step in and help as shepherds. Providing helpful resources to parents in their churches and encouraging them to use different discipleship tools with their kids are important aspects of shepherding care for families and particularly young families.

Discipleship in the home matters deeply to God; therefore, it must matter deeply to pastors. There are many passages throughout Scripture that emphasize this truth (see appendix 2). This is why home discipleship must be one of the chief strategies in shepherding. It is crucial to help families understand that home discipleship isn't simply another church program; it is a mandate to moms and dads from the Lord Himself.

For this reason, pastors need to strategize for how their church is going to equip parents to be the primary disciplers of

their kids in their homes. Most parents have never been instructed in home discipleship, nor did they grow up in homes where this kind of discipleship was modeled for them. Pastors and church leaders must equip them. In our experience, many Christian parents long to be trained in how to disciple their children. Pastors must build a culture where home discipleship is a priority.

We recommend creating a space somewhere in the church that is set apart to highlight home discipleship books and tools. The following list of ministries that have resources for family discipleship is a good place to start:

- ☐ **The Gospel Project:** gospelproject.com
- ☐ **Lifeway:** lifeway.com
- ☐ **D6:** d6family.com
- ☐ **Home Pointe:** drivefaithhome.com
- ☐ **Family Time Training:** famtime.com
- ☐ **Visionary Family Ministries:** visionaryfam.com
- ☐ **Faith at Home:** faithathome.com
- ☐ **Gospel Family Ministries:** gospelfamily.org
- ☐ **Rooted Ministry:** rootedministry.com
- ☐ **Center for Parent and Youth Understanding:** cpyu.org
- ☐ **Axis:** axis.org
- ☐ **Seeds Family Worship:** seedsfamilyworship.com

#4. Helping Children Get Connected to Godly, Caring Adults within the Congregation Who Can Serve as Role Models and Spiritual Mentors

In chapter 4, we'll discuss the nature and function of what we call a "shepherding team" for each kid in the church. For now, it is important to note that the local church family is called to play an integral role in the discipleship of kids, alongside parents and pastors. Many generations gathering together has more of an impact on kids than many realize (see chapter 3). One of the core commitments of our church is that members connect with one another authentically. Community begins on Sunday mornings, but it cannot fully develop during worship services. Therefore, church members are encouraged to join intergenerational community groups to connect with other believers.

If the church offers more than one service on Sunday mornings, pastors may encourage families to serve together in one service and worship together in another. This gives opportunities for intergenerational service within the church and gives families an easy way to worship together with their kids.

It might be that a young person in the flock needs someone to disciple them and serve as a spiritual mentor. As a shepherd, the pastor may not be the one who serves in this role, but it is their responsibility to help connect the young person with an adult or mature teenager who is trustworthy and solid—someone who can faithfully pour into them and feed them.

A Quick Word... on Pastor Plurality

No pastor can do it alone.

Perhaps a solo pastor can preach every week, make all the hospital visits, lead every wedding and funeral, follow up on visitors, and more all by himself for a while. But eventually, burnout will begin to set in.

It is for this reason, among many others, that we believe the Bible lays out an alternative model of pastoral leadership for the local church: a plurality of shepherd-pastors working together to care for the flock. As Brian Croft writes,

Although not explicitly stated by Paul to Timothy, it is consistently implied all throughout the New Testament that there is to be more than one pastor and deacon in each local church. Other than the passages that describe the qualifications of a pastor or deacon (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9) there are numerous examples of both these offices serving with other qualified men, sharing the responsibilities (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Heb. 13:17). Not to mention, the burdens and responsibilities of these two offices are too great for one man to carry alone.⁴²

While it may take some time to raise up other qualified pastors in the church, beyond the clear teaching of Scripture on this issue, let us briefly share four practical reasons it is wise to move toward this shared leadership model.

Reason #1: Helps to Ensure That Jesus Remains the Primary Leader and Hero of the Church

Any church that is built on one pastor is vulnerable to making that individual—rather than Jesus—the hero. A major problem with the solo pastor model is this: When things are going great in the church, a pastor gets far too much credit, and when things are going bad, he gets far too much blame. A plurality of pastors helps to keep each of these in check.

Reason #2: Prepares the Church for Future Health

Life is short. None of us will be in our church forever, which is why we should always seek to lead with the future in mind. Building a team of pastors who shepherd the flock helps to set the congregation up for healthy pastoral leadership when the lead pastor dies or is called to another ministry.

Reason #3: Sustainability Comes as a Result of Shared Pastoral Duties

Pastoral ministry is taxing on a physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual level. The primary reason, we believe, the Apostle Paul always speaks of a plurality of pastors (elders/overseers) in his letters is that one guy can't do it all alone! Shepherding takes a team to do well. If we desire to have pastors who are healthy in mind, body, and soul for the long haul, a plurality of shepherds is vital.

Reason #4: More Effective Pastoral Care of Children and Families

For a pastor who leads a small or aging congregation that has just a handful of kids, a plurality of pastors may not be needed to shepherd the children. However, if a pastor serves in a church that has a large number of younger kids, it is nearly impossible for one pastor to

truly know, on a personal level, every child in their church. For this reason, a plurality of pastors working together will help to assure that every child is known, fed, led, and protected the way God wants them to be.

STRATEGIES FOR LEADING THE FLOCK

Pastors are called to lead. They are called to lead with wisdom, gentleness, and courage. A visionary shepherding model includes three key leadership components to guide the sheep. These three leadership strategies are as follows.

#1: Leading Children by Way of Life Example in the Areas of Humble Service, Personal Godliness, and Love for Others

The ministry of the shepherd-pastor should be approached humbly and carried out with holy fear and trembling before the Lord. This is not an office designed for men who desire to rule and reign over the flock but for those who desire to serve and sacrifice their lives for the sheep Christ died to save. For this reason, pastoral leadership in the church must be marked by humble service, personal godliness, and love for others by God's grace and power. All other leadership duties and responsibilities must flow from these three primary pursuits. Godliness and love must always precede giftedness and skill for pastors.

#2: Get Involved with Children's Ministry Activities

For pastors, time is limited. But even in a busy schedule, pastors must look for opportunities to volunteer in the children's ministry in some capacity. We're not saying they need to do

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this every week, but they should be intentional to serve on a regular basis. Most pastors underestimate the impact they can have on kids by just showing up! Helping to lead worship or a special activity at Vacation Bible School, teaching Sunday School once a month, or serving as a counselor for church camp can show kids that pastors truly care about them and show the children's ministry leaders that pastors support what they are doing.

#3: Equip Parents to Lead Their Kids Spiritually

Many parents have never been trained to disciple their kids. Also, many men have never been given a model of what a godly man looks like. God uses pastors to provide such training and modeling. Through the discipleship ministry of the church, one-on-one relationships, pre-marital counseling, new members classes, members meetings, and more, God uses the life and teaching of pastors to equip parents in their role as primary disciple-makers.

#4: Provide Vision and Guidance for How the Congregation Can Be Involved in the Lives of Kids

This aspect of leadership connects the congregation to the mission of God to disciple the next generation. Vision casting to individuals for intergenerational discipleship is a huge part of this. More specifically, pastors must mobilize people to use their gifts and talents toward this end. Sharing vision and strategy is the responsibility of church pastors that is vital to understand and carry out the mission of making disciples of all ages.

STRATEGIES FOR PROTECTING THE FLOCK

Along with knowing, feeding, and leading the flock, Biblical shepherding involves protecting the flock. In Acts 20:28, we read these words for shepherd leaders: “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” As mentioned earlier, sheep struggle to protect themselves. Ask any shepherd, and they will say that sheep don’t work together like other herd animals to protect each other. They will allow a wolf to come in and kill the flock. Wolves are cunning. And just like the animal, spiritual wolves know exactly what they’re doing. They’re deceitful. And they’re out to destroy the souls of the sheep. Moreover, these types of wolves can and will attack from inside and outside the congregation. Shepherds must be on guard for this. Let’s consider a few important protecting strategies.

#1. Be Intentional to Protect Children from False Teaching through the Preaching and Discipleship Ministries of Your Church

For pastors, it is important to be aware of the authors and teachers who are speaking into the lives of their people. Who are they listening to? What are they reading? What messages are they taking in that are not of God but are of the world? A protecting shepherd stays in touch with what their congregation is taking in so he can help them identify false teachings and teachers. We’re not saying pastors must spend every day researching every false teaching and teacher that is out there. If this were the case, they would have no time to do anything else! What we’re saying is that as pastors shepherd their people and get to know their individual interests and influences, they should be

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prepared to step in with love and truth if and when the people begin to drift away from clear Biblical teaching.

Tim Challies puts it well:

The solution to false teachers and deadly doctrine is not to obsess with falsehoods but to pursue truth. The church that remains faithful to God is the church that remains faithful to the Word of God.⁴³

Pastors must saturate their people in preaching and discipleship environments with God's Word for their edification and their protection.

#2. Pray for God's Protection over the Children in Your Church

Prayer must be a top priority for shepherds. They must pray for the protection of the flock. They cannot forget that Satan is a spiritual being. Because of this, pastors need to protect the flock from spiritual attack with a spiritual weapon: prayer (see Eph 6:18). Pastors must set aside time to pray for the protection of their congregation, both on a macro and micro level. They should also invite other leaders to join them. There is nothing as powerful as prayer when it comes to protecting God's people.

#3. Create Clear Policies and Strategies for the Physical Safety of the Congregation, in Particular, Children and Youth

While the spiritual protection of the flock is critical to a pastor's shepherding care, they must also be mindful of the need to provide appropriate physical protection. They must make the churches safe for children. It's as simple as that: Make. It. Safe. Pastors can't be naive and take the approach of "Hey, trust us! We know everybody, we love each other, and we're a very safe

church!” Those outside of the church don’t know anything about the church, which is why the pastor must communicate not only that the church is safe, but that they have developed safety and security policies.

Jared Kennedy, who is an author and serves as an editor for the Gospel Coalition⁴⁴, recommends these safety and security essentials:

- Run complete background checks on all children’s ministry volunteers in addition to applications, training on guidelines, and volunteering interviews.
- Provide clearly marked registration areas where registration information is collected and a name tag and accompanying ID number can be assigned to each child for pick up. Volunteers must never release a child to a parent or family member without the proper ID tag or other appropriate identification.
- All volunteers must have identification. This may be a name-tag, a smock, or t-shirt with the church logo.
- Post and train volunteers on emergency policies, evacuation plans, diapering procedures, room schedules, and classroom-cleaning procedures. Toys, cribs, and other things that little hands and mouths touch should be washed or sanitized after each use.
- Post and follow appropriate volunteer/child ratios. Volunteers must never be alone with a child.
- Never give children food that has not been approved by parents. Allergies can be deadly.⁴⁵

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There is nothing more important than making sure kids are safe in church. Pastors must do all that they can to make sure children, teenagers, and their parents experience this.

HOW CAN PASTORS HELP PARENTS?

Parents need equipping and encouragement from their pastors as they grow into spiritual leaders. What does that look like? How can pastors help? Let's consider several specific ways.

#1. Pastors Must First Shepherd and Disciple Their Own Families

Pastors with kids or grandkids must practice what they preach, making home discipleship a top priority for their own family. If a pastor isn't passionate about helping their own children know and love the Lord, there will be a huge disconnect and lack of integrity when trying to lead the congregation in this. Pastors actively leading family worship, prayer, and Bible study in the home will have more compassion for their people as they try to do the same. Moreover, it will ensure their family remains as the most important ministry God has provided. Many have heard the statement "Lose your family, lose your ministry." It rings true because too many pastors jump over their wives and kids to reach the world when God has commanded them to be shepherds in their own homes first (see 1 Tim. 3:4-5).

#2. Pastors Must Disciple Parents

The strength of the discipleship ministry in the church will decide the strength of the family ministry within the church. Men and women must be discipled. Spiritual fathers and mothers must be enlisted to guide men and women to know Christ and

make Him known. Pastors must ensure that each member of the church is invited into a process of discipleship. Most Christian parents are more than willing to disciple their kids. However, they need someone to walk alongside them like Paul walked with Timothy. Pastors must ask themselves, “How important is discipleship in my church? Has anything else in my church taken precedence over the Great Commission?”

#3. Pastors Must Acknowledge Parents in Their Role and Encourage Them Like Crazy!

Pastors should publicly and regularly acknowledge parents’ discipleship role, saturating them with genuine encouragement. The worst thing pastors can do is condemn parents for not “stepping up” the way they should. At times, Biblical correction and even rebuke is needed, but most parents need encouragement far more. While Scripture provides conviction through the Holy Spirit, pastors can lovingly make a statement like the one Steve Stroope made many years ago to his congregation:

Guys, the church does have a job. The job of the church is to equip you as parents to inspire and to nurture the faith of your own children and we’re going to remind you of that again, and again and again. More than remind you, we’re gonna resource you. We’re gonna train you. We’re gonna get behind you. We’re gonna help you, but friends we cannot do your job for you.⁴⁶

Stroope is right. Pastors must acknowledge parents, provide resources, and then create a culture of genuine, ongoing encouragement! Parents need more than accountability in their spiritual leadership; they need to be regularly reminded that God is at work in their kids’ lives, that He loves them more than they do, and that He is using them powerfully even in their imperfect attempts to disciple their kids.

#4. Pastors Must Establish a Curated Church Schedule

Thom Rainer & Eric Geiger,⁴⁷ Timothy Paul Jones,⁴⁸ J. T. English,⁴⁹ and more have commented on the importance of creating and maintaining a church calendar connected to the mission of the church. Many assume that “more is always better” when it comes to programs in the church. We would argue that in most churches, “less is more” when it comes to church and family health.

#5. Pastors Must Provide Training in Family Worship

There are several organizations that provide training events in churches for families that want to learn how to worship together in their homes. At Family Time Training, we love to partner with church staff to encourage and equip parents for family worship. However, we also love to train local pastors to be the primary parent trainer. Regardless of how one approaches the concept of training parents, they should consider ways to integrate this equipping in existing contexts. Here are some examples:

- ☐ New members classes
- ☐ Parent orientations for children’s and youth ministries
- ☐ Youth camp
- ☐ Milestone events⁵⁰
- ☐ Weekly or monthly communication via newsletters

Pastors should think through environments or pathways that do not require excessive calendaring.

One more thing to point out: We believe that pastors need to be involved at some level in the family worship training initiative. This doesn't mean that a pastor must administer and lead every training event. However, pastors, and especially lead pastors, should champion family worship training opportunities more passionately than other staff members. Otherwise, over time, the value of family worship in the home will most likely be relegated to a second or third tier program of the church that is quickly forgotten. Pastors must do all they can to root the value of family worship in the culture of the congregation.

#6. Pastors Must Choose a Curriculum That Brings the Family Together

One of the lead pastor's main jobs is to keep the vision and mission of the church at the forefront. Though we are not recommending micromanagement of the church staff, we are advocating that the lead pastor be aware of the educational curriculum being used in the church—namely, do all generations within the church body learn the same material (adjusted for different ages), or are they learning different things? We realize it may be a challenge to align the Christian education/discipleship curriculum across all age groups. However, this helps families talk about what they are learning at home. In other words, it allows for ongoing reinforcement of the church teachings. We encourage pastors to consider how aligned curriculums might serve families and bring a sense of unity to their congregation.

#7. Pastors Must Provide Families with a Plan for Home Discipleship

When we begin working with churches who are trying to develop a more intentional home discipleship strategy for their congregation, we try to understand how parents within the church view their connection *to* the church and the church's role in home discipleship. We accomplish this through a simple survey process. What we have often found is that parents don't commonly feel that their church has provided a simple plan for them to use in the home. This is because a simple plan for home discipleship is rare in most churches. So, what can a pastor do? We encourage pastors to work with other staff members or church leaders to develop a simple, clear plan for parents to take home and put into practice. This plan is based on the vision and mission of the church and contextualized for families. While this takes time to craft, having this resource for people as soon as they check out the church shows that the pastors not only care about their attendance on Sunday mornings, but also the spiritual growth of their families throughout the week.

WHAT A PRIVILEGE AND JOY

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, being a pastor is a great privilege and joy. In the face of many challenges, there are countless blessings. Without question, one of the greatest blessings is being able to come alongside parents and children as they seek to grow in Christ together. Pastors should seek to equip and encourage parents, however they can, that the next generation might know and love Jesus with all that they are.

reflection questions

1. Pastors have been given a gift and privilege to shepherd those in their congregations. This includes kids! Why are kids not often connected to the ministry of lead pastors?
2. Pastors are called to know their flocks in macro and micro levels. What do we mean by that and what does it have to do with kids?
3. How can pastors make every kid feel seen and known in their churches?
4. How can pastors apply the principles of chapters 1 and 2 to their own families?
5. How can pastors consistently acknowledge parents' role as primary disciplers?