

How A Pastor Leads.

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A pastor leads. A shepherd guides. A leader models. People follow leaders. Instructors teach much, but they also lead by example. If a leader contradicts by his conduct what he instructs verbally then all his teaching is for naught. Be on guard lest you unteach with your life what you speak with your lips.

How must a pastor¹ lead? ***This article describes six ways a pastor leads.***

1. Loving his wife well.

Christ calls His shepherds to lead in the local church in the same way that He led His own while on earth. He served them, loved them, died for them, ministered to them, ministered to them, cared for them. The ultimate example of sacrificial love comes to light when one gazes at Calvary when Christ died for His bride. The greatest illustration to show what this love is like comes from the marriage relationship. Paul says that husbands must love their wives *just as* Christ loved the church. A man is qualified or disqualified based upon how well, how exemplary, how sacrificial, how shepherding, how strong his marriage relationship is like. If a man has a horrible marriage, he is a horrible shepherd. If a man has a mediocre marriage, then he has a mediocre ministry. If a man serves as a pastor and has a sour marriage at home, then he has disqualified himself for ministry. A man must shepherd his wife well, he must be a one-woman man, and he must manage his own household well. He must love her daily and deliberately. He must strive to know her and continue to explore her wishes, desires, fears, wants, and joys. He must put her before the church, before the needs of the flock, and even before the children and their needs. All must see and unquestionably know that the pastor loves his wife well. This is one of the best ways to lead as a shepherd. Let people see Christ's love in the gospel visibly portrayed in the life and conduct of their pastor as he daily, joyfully, and delightfully serves the apple of his eye and his companion from his youth, his precious wife.

2. Studying his bible often.

Shepherds teach. They feed. They impart truth. God calls elders to be able to teach and to do so clearly, persuasively, humbly, powerfully. Just as a shepherd feeds his sheep good food so the shepherd over Christ's flock must study to present himself approved to God, as a workman who doesn't need to be ashamed. He must accurately handle the Word of Truth. He must know one book very well: the Bible. Many men have hobbies. The man of God in ministry has one driving passion that consumes him: studying His Bible. Many fans know the roster of the sports team in the area but the man of God must be a relentless student who feeds upon and finds sustenance from the Word. Just as a bird returns again and again to a birdbath so the man of God must turn again and again to Scripture for joy, comfort, encouragement, hope, and gospel-

¹ By using the word "pastor", include the biblical office of shepherd/elder. This includes not only the "senior pastor" or the "teaching pastor" but all of the elders who provide guidance, oversight, and pastoral care to Christ's church.

reminders. Many people know many things but the pastor must busy himself to know the Word thoroughly. He has one relentless hunger and that is to feed on the bread of the Word constantly. He thirsts for Christ and he knows he finds Him in the Word! He thirsts for righteousness and he knows that he knows how to live by learning the precepts. He thirsts for the Spirit's enablement and he longs to keep in step with the Spirit as he reads the Spirit-inspired Scripture. He does not have to study, he delights in laboring over the Word! The shepherd must study his Bible often to care for his own soul, to shepherd the souls of those entrusted to his flock at home, and to minister to the souls of those in the local church. O ministers of God, study hard! Labor in the text! Apply the Word to your soul before you seek to dispense it to others! Comfort your soul and enflame your heart with the truths you'll give to others.

3. Pastoring His children diligently.

Many preachers become pastors of churches without search-committees or church leaders ever interviewing the prospective candidate's children. God demands that a shepherd over the church at large must demonstrate himself by shepherding his flock at home diligently. If a man can not take care of his own children how can he take care of the church of God? If he has forfeited his own family whom he loves most, what makes a church think that he will love them and care for them in the Word if he has forfeited his primary love at home? Pastors must pastor their children diligently. They must evangelize them faithfully. They must instruct them incessantly. They must warn them repeatedly. They must disciple them regularly. They must pray with and for them relentlessly. They must read the Word to and with them frequently. A pastor leads well when he pastors his own family well. This sets the example for the rest of the families in the church. If they see their pastor diligently shepherding his own children, evangelizing them, calling them to believe, entreating them to repent, warning them of unbelief, and reproving their rebellion, other dads and moms will see his example and strive to emulate it in their homes. This is discipleship and pastoral ministry! Ministers of God should have a plan for discipling the children that God has entrusted to his care. Pastors should prioritize the evangelism and nurturing of his children before he discipled everyone else in the flock. He must warn his own children of superficial faith and of hypocritical, external religiosity. He must plead with them to repent, turn from sin, embrace Christ, and follow Him with all their heart and soul! The man of God must teach them theology, he must instruct them on practical living, he must model how to pray, and he must exemplify a man of repentance. He must show them the profit of knowing and singing good hymns. He must radiate the bright rays of a man who rises early like the sun to awaken the dawn with his worship as he bows before His creator! Dads must not unpreach in the home what they preach forth in the pulpit. They must live what they herald. Pastors care for souls, how much more must the man of God care for the souls of those who live with him at home.

4. Laboring in prayer worshipfully.

Much of what the pastor does happens behind closed doors. Many people do not know nor do they understand what he spends much of his time doing. He is a man who is alone because he must be alone — with his God. The pastor leads well who prioritizes prayer. Like Elijah, the pastor prays earnestly (or, prays *in his praying*). He, like Christ, must pray and spends much time

in prayer. He prays not only through lists of items that need to be brought before God's throne, but he worships his God. He communes with the Trinity. He begs for revival. He pleads with God and presents His case from Scripture. He prays through the gospel. He warms his soul with the grand truths that he studies and he prays them back to God. He intercedes for his wife, his children, himself, and for the flock. He prays for his fellow-shepherds. He earnestly entreats God to raise up more leaders. He specifically prays for peace, unity, and harmony in the flock. He prays against division, pride, worldliness, public sin, scandals, and gossip. He longs for and prays for the kingdom of God to spread and desirously prays that God would use his ministry to work to that end. The pastor leads by praying for the flock: individually, by name, regularly, and thankfully. Like the Apostle Paul, the pastor prays for the flock and thanks God as he remembers them. His heart goes out to his flock and he loves them passionately, he longs for their growth preeminently, and he guards them tenaciously. All the while the pastor knows he cannot do all this adequately, so he beseeches God to impart strength, grace, and help so he can accomplish the humanly-impossible task of successfully and faithfully caring for God's people. He prays for people and they know it. The flock know that their shepherd brings them to God just as Aaron of old brought the people of Israel before God. The people know that they are on the pastor's heart just as the priests would have the names of the tribes etched on their garments. The pastor leads by example. He leads by prayer. He leads by modeling a man who gets alone to be with his God. He prioritizes prayer. He wakes up early to pray. He does pray because he must pray.

5. Caring for souls skillfully.

Like a masterful surgeon wields his tools to cut precisely and accurately to extract the cause of the illness, so the pastor must wield the Word in such a way that he uses it precisely and accurately to reach the root cause of the wickedness and to apply the proper remedy for the ailment. Pastoring is caring. To care for souls is to nurture souls. Pastoring demands that one deal with the brokenhearted, the bruised, the beat down, the dejected and the fainthearted. The pastor must constantly be going to the Word of God as His only divinely trusted and perfectly sufficient source for soul-care. The pastor does not need worldly methods or humanistic ideologies. He must skillfully wield the only tool that can cut to the root cause of a sin and apply the healing balm of the gospel of Jesus Christ to any and all illness and hardship. The pastor must counsel. He does not take individuals and pass them off by referring them to secular, or integrated, or 'Christian', professionals or psychologists. Rather, the pastor is in fact the ultimate one and the only one who can deal with people's problems adequately because he knows what the ultimate root cause is to problems, namely sin. The most professional, licensed, medically trained psychiatrist cannot adequately deal with people's sins and distresses because they fail to understand the most important and fundamental realities in the world: the existence and glory of God, the horrors and pervasiveness of sin, the selfishness and radical corruption of all people, and the gospel of grace whereby God regenerates a person's soul and makes them a new creature, and then the empowering grace that the Spirit of God has in empowering the believer to obey Him, submit to His Word, mortify sin, and walk in Christlikeness. Pastors must take up the sword of the Word, know it, memorize it, use it, wield it with skill, with care, with precision, with deliberateness, with compassion, and seek to walk with the hurting through the problems, pains, and paths of life so as to replace old, sinful habits with new, godly patterns. Or, the pastor must willingly walk with the struggling so that they endure a physical ailment and

triumph through it with a Godly attitude, with holiness, with joy, and with a patient, yet expectant hope of heaven. All of this happens, most gloriously, by God's blessed design within the context of the local church. As Christians bear one another's burdens, so pastors must care for souls diligently.

6. Preaching the gospel courageously.

Confronting error is very unpopular these days. Destroying fortresses and worldly speculations, however, is the divine mandate that God gives to His people. The man of God must know the gospel, believe the gospel, live the gospel, and be willing to die for the gospel. But till he dies, he must preach the gospel courageously. He must unflinchingly give the whole counsel of God. He must unashamedly preach on all portions of Scripture. He must unhesitatingly herald the vast spectrum of doctrines. He must warn sinners of hell and he must comfort believers with the sureness of heaven. He must reprove evil and he must encourage Christlikeness. He must expose the evils of this age and he must call believers to live 'otherworldly' lives with hearts and minds fixed on glory. Nothing stands in the way of this pastor as he preaches the gospel to those who are before him. He fears no man because he fears his God too much. Laws could be put in place that would forbid him to speak certain truths yet he remains resolved and strong like a granite mountain in that he will not shrink from declaring God's Word to all people. A pastor leads his flock by preaching the full gospel. He must speak of the existence and nature of God. He must show the flock the attributes of God so the people of God gaze upon God and meditate on His grandeur, glory, and Godhood. He must set before them the deplorable, horrid, offensive, hellish, monstrous and blasphemous nature of mankind. He must show the pervasive nature of sin and the devastating effects of sin. He must speak, however, of God's action in sending His Son into the world to redeem rebels by His grace and turn wretches into sons and make them heirs of His kingdom rather by snatching them from the grasp of the devil. He must preach on the work of redemption and all its related facets — propitiation, atonement, reconciliation, adoption, justification, regeneration, effectual calling, faith alone, repentance. He must show how Christ satisfied the just demands of God because His law was transgressed and how God punished His Son at Calvary in the place of deserving sinners. The guiltless One died for the guilty ones. The perfect One died in the stead of imperfect ones. The pastor must boldly call for a response and beg sinners to be reconciled to God. He must demand, like Christ did, that sinners repent and believe in the gospel. He must call, with God, and command sinners to repent because God has fixed a day when He will judge the world in righteousness! He must tell sinners that salvation is a free gift and that one must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and he will be saved! The door of mercy still stands open and the drawbridge of divine grace has not gone up yet! "Flee to Christ now!" he heralds! All of this models for the flock the importance of the gospel and the courage needed to live and verbally proclaim the gospel to the lost. A man must model this for the flock. He must do the work of the evangelist and fulfill his ministry.