

LESSON 7

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

Instructions:

1. Read through the handout 3 times this week.
2. Write out the 3 things that stood out to you most. These may be things that were new to you or possibly things the study helped you better understand. The goal is to help you dig into the study and better understand the information. Be prepared to discuss these things next week in class.

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

3. What is the difference between the terms pastor, elder, bishop, and shepherd?

4. What are the roles of pastor/elder that are most important to you?

5. Are there any biblical responses to leadership that you desire to improve in? If so, which ones?

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

We have explored how the journey of the Christian life is not to be merely an individual one, but a journey we undertake with others. We are not self-sufficient, independent creatures, but we need the help and blessing that comes from relationships with other believers in the context of the local church. In addition to the normal relationships with others in the church, God provides another essential means of grace for our lives: the leadership and care that comes from pastoral ministry.

To enable the building of his church and the extension of the gospel, God has appointed leaders within the local church. All too often, deficiencies in the church regarding the importance of leadership and the biblical role of elders have sentenced congregations to immaturity and aimlessness. God's desire, however, is for churches to experience the maturity, stability, and fruitfulness that result when leadership and care are extended by gifted leaders with proven character. In this lesson, we will explore the biblical mandate for, and strategic importance of, pastoral leadership—God's provision for all of us to experience "care along the journey."

"Effective leadership is the need of the hour, and for the church under mandate to evangelize the world, it is an indispensable requirement—indeed an urgent agenda."—**Alex Montoya**

I. The Biblical Basis for Pastoral Ministry

A. Clarifying the terms

The New Testament uses three main terms to speak of what we typically call a "pastor:" elder (*presbyteros*-Titus 1:5; 1 Timothy 5:17), overseer/bishop (*episkopos*-1 Timothy 3:1-2; Titus 1:7), and pastor (*poimen*-Ephesians 4:11¹). Scholars have long agreed that these terms, instead of indicating separate offices, are actually used interchangeably², giving us three different facets of the same office:

- Overseer/bishop indicates the role of oversight.
- Pastor indicates the role of care.
- Elder indicates the necessity of spiritual maturity.

B. The imperative of a biblical perspective

It is increasingly popular for pastoral ministry to be pragmatically defined or culturally conditioned, rather than scripturally determined. When this occurs, the role of the pastor is distorted, the effectiveness of the pastor is diminished, and the health of the church is weakened.

II. The Characteristics of a Pastor/Elder

The Scriptures give us clear guidelines for viewing pastors and for determining what pastors are to be like. These markers provide for us both perspective (to view this through God's eyes) and protection (from cultural distortion).

A. A gift from God to the church

Unlike gifts such as exhortation, administration, and mercy, some gifts God gives to the church are actually people—the leaders God gives to serve the church.

¹ The verb form of the word "pastor" appears in 1 Peter 5:2.

² For example, compare Titus 1:5-6 with v. 7; 1 Peter 3:1-7 with 5:17-19.

Ephesians 4:7-8, 11-14: "But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.'...And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."

B. A model for the church

Pastors are to lead lives of integrity, faithfully modeling biblical standards for the Christian life. Indeed, all of the biblical qualifications for an elder except one deal with character. Pastors are certainly not sinless, but there should be the consistent display of these characteristics in their lives.

1 Timothy 3:1-7: "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil."

Pastors in this local church take this responsibility to be an example seriously, and they pursue accountability to one another, as well as other leaders within the church.

C. Consistent with God's design for the church

In addition to the requirement of godly character, Scripture also teaches that leadership in the church is to be exercised in a primary way by men (1 Timothy 2:11-15). This requirement, far from being an outmoded, culturally-conditioned standard, instead reflects the unique and complementary roles men and women have as part of the created order.

We seek to affirm and apply all that Scripture teaches about manhood and womanhood. Indeed, the biblical vision of manhood and womanhood is a glorious one! Both men and women are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Therefore, men and women are equal in value and dignity. We have equal worth before God, equal access to Christ and the blessings of salvation (Galatians 3:28; Acts 2:17-18), and we are equally valued members of the body of Christ. This Scriptural vision leaves no room for feelings of superiority or inferiority, for pride or discouragement, on the basis of gender.

Scripture is also clear that men and women have different—but equally valuable roles in the home and in the church. All members of the body of Christ are gifted by God and are essential to the health of the church (1 Corinthians 12:4-26). However, Scripture restricts the primary governing and teaching roles in the church to men (1 Timothy 2:11-15). Because we desire Scripture to govern our practice, the elders of this church are all men. As pastors, we count it an unspeakable privilege to care for and equip all the members of our church, both men and women, to fulfill their God-given callings and to bear fruit for his glory and for the good of the church.

D. Recognized by the church

Since God gives leadership to the church, it is the responsibility of the church, and especially the church's leaders, to recognize and acknowledge this leadership. When we use biblical criteria to assess leadership in the church, we can be confident that our leaders are called by God and given to the church to lead us.

“God, who drafts men and fits them for ministry, intends that his work in them be on display so brightly that the church is able to see it, and then able to confirm His call through their appointment to public ministry.”—**David Hegg**

III. The Role of a Pastor/Elder

In the early stages of the church, leaders recognized the importance of maintaining biblical priorities in their labors (see Acts 6:1-4). The Scriptures outline what the job description of a pastor should be.

A. Lead the church.

According to Scripture, elders are called by God and accountable to God to lead the local church. The Bible describes this in various ways:

1 Timothy 5:17: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”

1 Peter 5:2: “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight...”

1 Timothy 3:4-5: “[An elder] must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?”

Romans 12:6, 8: “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them:...the one who leads, with zeal.”

B. Nourish the church.

God has ordained His Word as the primary instrument for the nourishment and strengthening of His church, and He charges pastors with the task of feeding the church with His Word. Indeed, the health and future of the church depends upon His leaders faithfully transmitting sound doctrine and biblical practice to others.

1 Timothy 4:6: “In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following” (NASB).

2 Timothy 4:1-2: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”

C. Equip the church.

The pastor is to be an equipper, training the church so that each member may be positioned for maximum fruitfulness in his or her life. One sign of effective pastoral ministry is the extent to which people are equipped to then serve others. In a healthy local church, leaders train—people minister!

Ephesians 4:11-12: “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry...”

D. Protect the church.

As shepherds of God’s people, pastors are called to protect the church from the dangers it faces, such as false teaching, the allurements of the world, and the ravaging effects of sin. Pastors protect the church in a variety of ways:

1. Teaching sound doctrine to strengthen the church in its faith and life

1 Timothy 4:6: “In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following” (NASB).

2. Discerning errors and temptations offered by the culture, to protect the church from erroneous doctrine or practice

Acts 20:28-31: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.”

3. Modeling, encouraging, and protecting biblical standards of godliness. This includes, when necessary, the administering of church discipline in cases of unrepentant believers in a biblical and redemptive manner.

Matthew 18:15-17: “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

“A shepherd’s oversight of the flock expresses itself broadly in two ways. First, the shepherds provide truthful, positive direction and leadership to the flock. Second, they watch for spiritual dangers such as sin, false teaching, and false teachers, including Satan’s assaults against the church.”
—**John MacArthur, Jr.**

E. Serve the church.

Although pastors are responsible to lead the church, they are to do so as servants. Following the example of Jesus who “came not to be served but to serve” (Mark 10:45), leaders are to posture themselves as servants and expend themselves for the glory of God and the good of others.

Mark 10:43-45: "But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

1 Peter 5:2-3: "shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."

IV. The Biblical Response to Leadership in the Church

A. Actively identify your designated place of involvement.

The New Testament is clear that each Christian is allotted by God to a specific local church and to the eldership of that church. This divine assignment results in numerous benefits:

- It helps to ensure that believers are properly cared for.
- It provides an explicit context in which believers are to serve others.
- It helps leaders to identify those for whom they are accountable before God.
- It creates an accountability arrangement in which unrepentant believers can be cared for biblically and redemptively.

Hebrews 13:17: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."

B. Exercise the responsibilities of membership.

At our church, there are certain expectations of members, which are simply expressions of a biblical commitment to a particular local church. It would be natural to expect that any member who is pursuing his or her relationship with God and believes that God has called him or her to this church will fulfill these expectations:

1. Support of the church's Statement of Faith
2. Consistent participation in the Sunday morning meeting
3. Consistent participation in a Growth Group
4. Regular involvement in serving
5. Regular financial support of the church
6. Willingness to support and follow the leadership of the church
7. A commitment to living by God's Word and to growing in godliness

C. Maintain a biblical attitude toward your leaders.

To our individualistic culture, the Bible's commands concerning leaders might seem antiquated or, perhaps, authoritative. Neither is the case. And, as with all the Bible's commands, proper understanding and faith-filled obedience will result in blessing for ourselves and for the church as a whole. By what should our attitudes be characterized?

1. A faith-filled submission

Hebrews 13:17: “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

Submission does not mean passivity or blind obedience. Rather, submission is an expression of faith towards God—that He has appointed leaders for us and He will use them for our good. It recognizes the critical role that leadership plays in bringing about God’s purposes in the church and in the lives of believers. Fundamentally, submission is an attitude: a disposition to affirm and support the leadership of the church, and to increase its effectiveness through joyful and faith-filled participation.

2. A God-honoring appreciation

1 Timothy 5:17: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13: “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among ourselves.”

The appeal to honor leaders can seem self-serving. Biblically, though, honor is an expression of humility and integrity. The biblical concept of honor exhorts us to recognize God’s provision through another person, to cultivate gratitude for this provision, and rightfully to appreciate and acknowledge those who have served and benefited us. In so doing, we are actually giving glory to God for his goodness to us through other people. There exists an unfortunate confusion between exalting leaders and honoring leaders in the body of Christ. Exalting leaders is idolatry and is totally unacceptable. Honoring leaders, however, is biblical and should be the regular attitude and practice of every Christian.

D. Support your leaders in their labors.

The apostle John voiced a sentiment which resonates in the heart of every pastor: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 4). In addition to passionately pursuing God, believers can support the labors of their pastors in many ways:

- Joyfully participating in the life of the church.
- Praying for your elders.
- Refusing to listen to slander or accusation against your elders.

V. The Blessings of Leadership

Biblically, ungodly leadership (or the absence of leadership) is viewed as an expression of God’s judgment, and godly leadership as an expression of blessing (e.g., Isaiah 3:1-5). The same is true in the church: God appoints leaders for the purpose of bringing about His intentions for the church, including health, growth, stability, and maturity.

Ultimately, the church’s leaders are a primary means by which God’s own care for His people is expressed. Pastors are merely under-shepherds, laboring on behalf of the Chief Shepherd—Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:2, 4). As a famous hymn states, the journey of the Christian life is fraught with “many dangers, toils, and snares.” Leadership in the church helps provide “care along the journey,” that we might not only have safe passage, but grow into the fullness of God’s purposes for the church, for His glory.