

“In a calling perpetually faced with the temptations to either focus on individual achievement or passively go with the flow, Jon Payne gives us a thoroughly biblical vision for both the benefit and beauty of collaborative labor in ministry. *Pastoring Together* is singularly practical, yet it taps into and celebrates the joy of pastoral teamwork. With sober realism and an eye toward the importance of the ordinary daily and weekly rhythms of pastoral life, Jon Payne provides a very useful primer on doing ministry together.”

—Mike Bullmore, *Founding Pastor*

CrossWay Community Church, Bristol, WI

“Pastoral team health and unity are often ignored, yet they are vital for the health and unity of the church. That’s why *Pastoring Together* is a must read for every pastoral team in Sovereign Grace Churches and beyond. Born from years of pastoral team experience, this book not only provides the theological foundations for team ministry, but it sets forth the godly character that teams need to cultivate, along with wise and practical steps each team can implement for the good of their church and the glory of Christ.”

—Mark Prater, *Executive Director*

Sovereign Grace Churches

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PASTORING TOGETHER

PASTORING TOGETHER

The Joyful Call of Team Ministry

Jon Payne



To my Dad,
A loving shepherd of the sheep
A faithful picture of the Father's heart
I'll always see better on your shoulders
I'll always be honored to be your son

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Introduction

THE BOYS IN THE BOAT

In his book *The Boys in the Boat*, Daniel James Brown tells the story of the men's rowing team from the University of Washington in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. It is a story of overcoming adversity, and perhaps above all, a story of teamwork. Over sixty years after the competition, Brown enjoyed conversations with one of the rowers about his experience. His name was Joe Rantz.

It was when he tried to talk about 'the boat' that his words began to falter and tears welled up in his eyes. . . . Finally, watching Joe struggle for composure over and over, I realized that 'the boat' was something more than just the shell or its crew. To Joe, it encompassed but transcended both—it was something mysterious and almost beyond definition. It was a shared experience—a singular thing that had unfolded in a golden sliver of time long gone, when nine good-hearted young men strove together, pulled together as one, gave everything they had for one another, bound together forever by pride and respect and love. Joe was crying, at least in part, for the loss of that vanished moment but much more, I think, for the sheer beauty of it.¹

I've known something of that joy, something of that sacred beauty. Perhaps you have too. I've never been on a rowing team, but I know how Joe was feeling, remembering those moments when brothers pull

1. Daniel James Brown, *The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2014), 2.

together as one, bound together by love and shared mission. And like Joe, I'm sure in my final years I will weep to remember that golden sliver of time when I was given the gift of a place on a pastoral team.

A Challenge and a Privilege

Of course rowing is not always glamorous, not always beautiful, and pastoral ministry is certainly not either! Pastors have high moments and low moments, and pastoral teams have joys and sorrows, unity and conflict, mission and stagnation.

Perhaps you're reading from one of those low moments right now. Perhaps you're facing disappointment or disunity. Perhaps your pastoral team is not skimming smoothly across the water of mission and healthy church life. This book is for you. It is meant to inspire and encourage, to remind and exhort us about the thrilling and sober calling that is pastoral team ministry. Perhaps you're reading from a high moment right now, with a pastoral team that feels close to the joy and honor of "the boys in the boat." I hope this book motivates you to keep racing in such a way that you will win. Or perhaps you're somewhere in between. This book is for you.

This book is for pastors and those who wonder about the pastoral calling. It's not written by an expert, but from a fellow pastor. I don't write from the heights of pastoral team perfection, but from a passion for healthy pastoral teams. I pray that God will use this brief work to keep us grateful and keep us growing. I pray it will keep us from taking this golden sliver of time for granted, until the Great Shepherd brings our pastoring days to an end.

This is a book about pastoral team ministry. It is not a book about the general practice of pastoral ministry or about the doctrines that should be the foundation and content of every pastor's ministry. It is a book about pastoring together, pastoring as a team, functioning as a unified but distinct group of men called together to care for the people of God.

Not all pastors are given this joy. Some faithful pastors are called to labor alone among the flock. If that is you, please know that you have my deepest respect and a desire that you would experience partnership and brotherhood from other pastors in other churches. This is the joy of pastoring in a denominational family like Sovereign Grace Churches—even solo pastors can experience many of the joys of partnership through an extra-local brotherhood of shepherds.

But pastoring together at a local level represents a unique challenge and a unique privilege. Pastoral teams can be a great gift or a great calamity for a church. Healthy teams are a joy to the flock, but unhealthy teams can be their ruin. In Sovereign Grace we have glimpsed the joy of healthy, biblical pastoral teams and we've seen the sorrow of team division and dysfunction. In the end, we've learned that team ministry is good work, but it's hard work. It must not be neglected; it must not be assumed. Presumption about pastoral team health can lead to team demise which can lead, in the worst cases, to the death of a local church. Pastors must not take team health for granted.

Three Burdens

In order to help pastors guard their team, this book is organized around three burdens. Section one, "The Theology of Pastoring Together," grounds our view of pastoral ministry in the authority of God's Word. Some pastoral teams can be tempted to model their ministry after the business world, but God's Word is our manual for ministry and only his Word contains the power to revive our souls to minister together according to his will.

Section two, "The Character of Pastoring Together," may be the most important section of the book. Good team principles and practices are worthless if the shepherds are not reflecting the gospel toward one another. We are Christians first and pastors second, and godliness is the heart of a healthy pastoral team.

Section three, “The Practice of Pastoring Together,” addresses a number of practical areas that healthy teams must navigate, such as team meetings, team fellowship, and even topics that sometimes cause greater tension such as team salaries, role transitions, and church crises.

The conclusion, “Pastoring Together for the Chief Shepherd,” will seek to lift our eyes to eternity and the longing we all have of hearing “Well done” for our own labors and those of our fellow pastors.

With that glorious day in view, I offer the following study to my brothers, Sovereign Grace pastors, and any other gospel pastors who may read it, that we may row well together.

Section 1

The Theology of Pastoring Together

Our theology should always govern our practice of ministry, and that includes our practice of team ministry. Fortunately, we find in the Bible a treasure of truth related to team ministry—truth that has absolute authority and reviving power for pastoral teams. Because of that, the first section of this book will study the biblical principles and patterns that should define how we pastor together. Our call is to watch our life and doctrine, and these chapters aim to help us watch our life and doctrine as we pastor together.

WATCH YOUR GOSPEL

*I saw one hanging on a tree
In agony and blood
Who fixed his languid eyes on me
As near his cross I stood*

*A second look he gave which said
I freely all forgive
This blood is for your ransom paid
I died that you might live*

(John Newton)

For over thirty years now I have been granted the gift of listening to preaching on the cross of Jesus Christ. Pastors who were amazed that Jesus died for them preached their hearts out while I sat in the congregation. They taught me to cling to that gospel and to make sure it was the lens through which I understood the Christian life. Now I am humbled to count myself among that pastoral company. And I want to carry on their gospel-rich tradition for the next generation of pastors in our family of churches.

A Sacred Motivation

So, what does the cross of Christ have to do with pastoring together? Let's allow the apostle Paul to answer that question. In this chapter we'll look at Paul's charge to the Ephesians elders, found in Acts 20. Paul warns the elders about potential danger arising from among

them. “From among your own selves,” Paul says, “will arise men speaking twisted things . . .” (Acts 20:30).

This book’s aim is to heed Paul’s warning and guard the health of our pastoral teams. But before we get to the priority of pastoral team health, let’s remember Paul’s motivation for his pastoral exhortation. His charge to “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock” in verse 28 is followed by three profound phrases that provide powerful motivation for our pastoral watchfulness, including our care for our pastoral team.

Pay careful attention . . . to the flock . . .

And now the motivation:

*in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers
to care for the church of God
which he obtained with his own blood.*

Those three phrases are stunning. God himself makes pastors what they are. This is not a position claimed by birthright or by personal achievement, but granted as a privilege according to God’s own choice. We serve at the pleasure of the Holy Spirit. No higher vocational honor exists.

More than that, our task is to care for God’s own church: his own people, the saints that he claimed for his own possession, treasures of his own grace and affection.

And lest we still haven’t gotten the full impact of this privilege and burden, Paul issues the climax: “the flock . . . which he obtained with his own blood.” Here is the connection between the cross of Christ and our pastoral charge, including our charge to watch our team.

The church was obtained, purchased, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. The saints are those purchased from judgement by the human lifeblood of God the Son. The purpose of the incarnation was that God’s immortal Son could take on our mortal nature and die in place of each and every one of his sheep.

The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all and by his death paid our ransom. Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath so we could drink the cup of God's salvation. He was wounded that his people could be healed, stricken so his people could be rescued, slaughtered so his people could be forgiven.

And here is the shocking connection between this gospel and the theme of this book: God has entrusted his blood-bought sheep to our care.

Entrusted to Undershepherds

Impossibly, after paying such a price, a price beyond counting, God entrusts the spiritual care of these blood-bought sheep to fallible, weak, human sheep called as shepherds of the church. It is beyond belief, beyond any comparison, to assess the honor given to pastors. That Christ's blood-bought sheep should be stewarded by us, my pastor brothers, should send us to our knees in humble awe.

What about our fellow pastors? What about our team? They are first sheep that are likewise purchased by the blood, and for that reason alone they should receive our vigilant and affectionate care. And they are also shepherds who are caring for that precious flock. The flock of Christ will be harmed or helped by these shepherds God has placed next to us. Therefore, our care for them is an incredible, sober, crucial, and desperate privilege and responsibility.

The cross of Christ requires care and watchfulness for our pastoral team. Failure to do this is to neglect the men to whom the lambs of Christ have been entrusted. Diligence in this is guarding the guardians of Christ's ransomed people.

Team ministry is not more important than the gospel. It's not even more important than our individual calling as pastors. But it flows from and demonstrates our appreciation to both.

Loving the one who died on that tree, we must love the flock he died for. And caring for that flock includes the crucial task of caring for those who are caring for them. We must *watch our gospel* and that will cause us to *watch our team*.

WATCH YOUR TEAM

Standing near to the shore, Paul stood with his dear friends, the Ephesian elders. He was going to Jerusalem, expecting imprisonment and death. He did not expect to see them again. They were all very dear to each other, having labored together in the flock of the Lord. They were brothers, co-laborers, united in Christ, united in mission, and now preparing to part for the last time.

All of Paul's speech in Acts 20 is worth the repeated study of every pastor, but let's focus on verses 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 every one with tears. (Acts 20:28–31)

Guarding Against Complacency

The purchase price of the church should jump out to us, blazoned across our hearts as a perpetual motive in loving God's people. In light of that motive, meditate on Paul's vigilance against pastoral complacency and presumption.

The Ephesian church did not lack in a strong leadership pedigree. Paul himself had ministered there for three years. Yet he is determined to warn the Ephesian elders against complacency, and not just

complacency among the church members. They are to keep a close watch on themselves. From their own group he fears that dangers to the church could arise (and it seems from the content of 1 Timothy that his prediction was correct).

Surely this passage requires every pastor to apply Paul's command to Timothy to "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching" (1 Tim. 4:16), but I believe it also requires something more. It requires us to watch over our pastoral team. Paul did not intend the Ephesian elders to be indifferent to team decline as long as their own soul was prospering! A rower must row in sync with his fellow boatmates, concerned for their progress as well as his own, and for the unity of the whole. The pastor must do the same.

According to Paul, pastors, and therefore, pastoral teams, are not perpetual motion machines, set in motion for faithful gospel ministry and certain to keep going without fail as long as no one gets in their way. Rather, like all Christians, pastors are in danger of self-deception, of complacency, of preaching to others and then finding that they are disqualified themselves (1 Cor. 9:27). And since the failure of pastors brings great damage to the flock, fellow pastors must work hard to resist complacency in keeping watch over the health of their pastoral team.

We are indeed our brother's keeper. He is a sheep for whom Christ died, and he has care of God's precious flock as well.

A Priority of Pastoral Faithfulness

Beyond the personal faithfulness of our fellow pastors, there is the example that the pastoral team sets for the flock. If the pastors do not serve in unity, it will be difficult to preach about the unified dependence of the whole church body from 1 Corinthians 12 with integrity. If pastors do not bear each other's burdens, it will be challenging to call the rest of the church to do so (Gal. 6:1-2). If pastors do not place the gospel mission above their own desires, the church members may find our teaching from Philippians 1 and 2 to be hypocritical.

Therefore, the health of the team should be a priority of pastoral faithfulness. Our response to this conclusion, however, is just as important as reaching it. Pastors are busy, burdened, and have a thousand things to do. How do we remain faithful in watching our team? Is the master strategy for healthy teams concealed somewhere in the business section of Amazon books? In the latest team coaching techniques? In our own ingenuity? No! “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain” (Ps. 127:1). And the Lord always builds his people through his Word.

Healthy pastoral teams must be continually revived by God’s Word. His Word alone has the power to renew the health and faithfulness of our pastoral teams. Thankfully, he has provided power-packed passages to revive our hearts in the doctrine of pastoral plurality and team mission. These passages are meant to inspire us, to instruct us, to warn us, and to revive us. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul (Ps. 19:7)—and the word of the Lord *about team ministry* revives the soul of the pastoral team.

Too often, pastors neglect the Biblical teaching about team ministry. We reach a technical conviction about plurality and rarely study those passages again.

So, let’s study the Biblical passages and principles of pastoring together. And let’s make this a habit for our future. Presumption about pastoral team health can be deadly, but God’s Word *about pastoring together* will revive the soul.

THE WORD ON PLURALITY

God loves pastoral teams. The New Testament makes this love quite clear. It is not that churches cannot exist without a plurality of pastors—some churches have been founded without pastors at all. We must also never demote the biblical priority of pastoral qualifications in order to achieve plurality. Better to have one pastor (or none) than disqualified men operating in this role.

With these caveats in place, it is worth touring some of the explicit passages that reference a plurality of pastors serving in a church. As we have seen, pastoral presumption about teams can flow from a neglect of God's Word about teams. Reviewing God's Word about plurality inspires a fresh conviction to value and support the pastoral team God has given to us.

Before our tour, credit should be given to Alexander Strauch, whose book *Biblical Eldership* provides a decisive case for plural eldership by exploring the very texts (and more) that we are about to review.² (By the way, if you haven't read his book, I'd urge you to stop reading this one right now and go read that one first! Go for it. See you soon. . . . Welcome back. Good book, right?!)

A Consistent Pattern

Let's take a fresh look at these Scriptures with the goal of renewing our hearts in loving what God loves and thinking God's thoughts after

2. Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Colorado Springs, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995).

him regarding pastoral teams. These Scriptures specifically reference a plurality of elders in a single church. I've noted plural and singular words in the original Greek.

And when they had appointed elders [plural] for them in every church [singular], with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23)

When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church [singular] and the apostles and the elders [plural], and they declared all that God had done with them. (Acts 15:4)

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders [plural], with the whole church [singular], to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers. (Acts 15:22)

Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders [plural] of the church [singular] to come to him. (Acts 20:17)

Pay careful attention to yourselves [plural] and to all the flock [singular], in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [plural], to care for the church [singular] of God, which he obtained with his own blood. (Acts 20:28)

When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. (Acts 21:17–18)

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons. (Phil. 1:1)

We ask you, brothers, to respect those [plural] 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 yourselves. (1 Thess. 5:12–13)

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. (1 Tim. 4:14)³

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. (1 Tim. 5:17)⁴

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders [plural] in every town [singular] as I directed you. (Titus 1:5)

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders [plural] of the church [singular], and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. (James 5:14)

As Strauch decisively comments,

On a local church level, the New Testament plainly witnesses to a consistent pattern of shared pastoral leadership. Therefore, leadership by a plurality of elders is a sound biblical practice.⁵

To put it another way, consider what we know of the church leadership in the New Testament:

1. The church in Jerusalem was led by a plurality of elders, along with apostles (Acts 15:4).

3. “Council of elders” is a reference to multiple elders operating in a single body. It seems highly likely that this is referring to a moment when the elders of a local church laid their hands on Timothy.

4. It is possible that Paul is speaking to Timothy here as an apostolic delegate, with directions for multiple churches, but since chapter 1 references why Paul left Timothy in Ephesus the most transparent circumstance refers to the multiple elders in the Ephesian church.

5. Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 37.

2. The church in Antioch was led by a plurality called prophets and teachers, some (all?) of whom we can presume were elders (Acts 13:1–3).
3. The churches at Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia were led by a plurality of elders (Acts 14:21–23).
4. The church at Ephesus was led by a plurality of elders (Acts 20:17, 1 Tim. 5:17).
5. The church at Philippi was led by a plurality of elders (Phil. 1:1).
6. The church at Thessalonica was led by a plurality, presumably of elders (1 Thess. 5:12–13).
7. The churches of Crete were each led by a plurality of elders (Titus 1:5).
8. The churches addressed by James, the “twelve tribes in the Dispersion” (James 1:1), were each led by a plurality of elders (James 5:14).

And, put in contrast, Bruce Stabbert writes, “There is not one passage which describes a church being governed by one pastor.”⁶

God Loves Pastoral Teams

Now, it’s time to reiterate the opening caveats. This overwhelming pattern must be complemented by the biblical requirements of qualified pastors and the record that churches were often planted in the New Testament without an established eldership. But the clear implication of the pattern above is that God loves pastoral teams.

This New Testament pattern is not an accident, nor merely an incidental church history fact. This pattern must inform our practice and shape our hearts.

Here are a few brief implications that we’ll cover more in depth in the chapters to come.

6. Quoted in Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 38.

- If God loves team pastoring, we should love it too. It is not enough simply to reflect the patterns God gives us; we should delight in them, find joy in them, see the wisdom of them. This must be our disposition toward any qualified pastoral team that we are honored to join or partner with.
- If God's wisdom has settled on team pastoring, we should agree with him. Team pastoring can seem inefficient, or burdensome, or confusing. But God is wiser than us, and we must humble ourselves and remember that he knows much better than we do what is best for his church. With the same office, but with unique abilities, we should "row" together for the glory of Christ.
- If God wanted Paul and Titus to raise up a plurality of pastors, we should too. Sometimes we can affirm that we love and trust the biblical pattern of plurality, but make no effort to fulfill that pattern in our own church. Raising up qualified pastors is hard work, and requires relational and missional sacrifice. But we must not settle into complacency. Rather, we must press forward in raising up "faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

God loves pastoral teams. We should too.

THE MODELS OF TEAM MINISTRY

“Switch to decaf, pal.”

We were in the middle of a team meeting and I was frustrated. One of the pastors was making a proposal that I found . . . problematic. I had just shared my earnest objections, more strongly than the situation warranted. One of the older pastors, noting my excessive, youthful zeal, chuckled at me and helped me out. “Switch to decaf, pal.” I still smile thinking about it.

Do you ever feel frustrated in team ministry? Be honest. Sometimes team ministry is hard work. Sometimes fellow pastors are optimistic when we want them to be more thoughtful, or concerned when we want them to be hopeful. Sometimes they offer advice we don’t think we need, or forget advice we thought was clear. Sometimes pastors make dumb proposals. And, on top of it all, we’re still sinful.

We need motivation for our calling to team ministry.

Jesus and the Twelve

The passages we have examined will revive us and realign our hearts. But the New Testament provides even more teaching on team ministry than those explicit references to multiple elders in a single church. We also have an abundance of direct models for team ministry, particularly in Jesus and the disciples, and Paul and his fellow workers. We don’t share the authority of these men, but we are meant to follow their example.

Jesus chose twelve disciples. Of course, that number is unique and glorious. These men would represent the new era of the people of God in Christ—twelve reflecting the twelve tribes of Israel. But Jesus

also sent them out two by two to preach, heal, and cast out demons (Mark 6:7), and he requested that Peter, James, and John accompany him in his final moments of prayer in the garden. The two by two groupings for mission may have been a way of reflecting the Old Testament standard of having two witnesses to establish the truth of testimony in legal court. Jesus wanted these brothers to have a fellow witness to verify their testimony about the arrival of the kingdom of God in Christ.

Jesus is the perfect reflection of the Godhead. This means that just as God the Father loves teams, so God the Son loves teams. He created a team to represent him and to labor together to establish the church. He did not intend a single individual to govern the expansion of his testimony but a body of authoritative witnesses.

Paul and His Fellow Workers

Studying the ministry of Paul should strike us the same way. Paul loved teams. Everywhere Paul went he wanted fellow laborers with him. His first church planting journey was launched from a plurality of leaders in Antioch, and though Paul was willing to be alone if absolutely necessary (Athens), his strong preference was for his team to be with him.

Think of Paul's journeys with Barnabas, and Silas, and Luke, and his on-the-road discipleship of Timothy. He envisioned planting and strengthening churches as a team project. And if Paul loved teams—Paul the Scripture writer, Paul the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul the witness to the third heavens, and Paul the martyr—if Paul loved teams, we should too.

Consider also the love Paul had for his fellow workers. Let me challenge you: study the references in Paul's letters to his fellow workers. They are packed at the end of several of his letters, and are scattered into the body as well. But, here's the key: consider them in terms of your own current affection for your pastoral team. If we want

motivation for a grateful team ministry, we will find it in studying these passages.

Here are just some examples:

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. (Rom. 16:3–4)

When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers. (1 Cor. 16:10–11)

When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia. (2 Cor. 2:12–13)

So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts. (Eph. 6:21–22)

But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. (Phil. 2:22)

I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. (Phil. 2:25–27)

Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I

have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here. Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him) . . . (Col. 4:7–10)

Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. (2 Tim. 4:11)

Paul loved his fellow workers, he longed for them, he depended on them, he sent them sacrificially into mission, he was publicly grateful for them, he honored them, and he encouraged the church to follow their example. I want to be like Paul in this way, not just toward fellow Christians, and not just toward extra-local fellow workers, but toward my fellow pastors as well!

Studying the twelve disciples and Paul provide the model of affection for our pastoral team. We need ongoing study of these models to keep our hearts grateful for and serving “the boys in our boat” year by year.

REAL PASTORS MAKE REAL PASTORAL TEAMS

Band practice! Charts and chords and parts and copies and . . . band practice.

Much of my early ministry was devoted to leading worship and music teams for churches, which meant a lot of band practices. So, what makes a great band a great band? I've heard the assumption that frequent practice is the key. "They need to practice a lot together so they can get in a groove." So I've been told. But it's not true.

At least, it's not the main thing that makes a great band. Regular practice is good, but the key to a great band? *Great musicians. Great band members.*

To put it bluntly, unqualified musicians will never be a great band, no matter how often they practice together. But great musicians can play very well together after only one rehearsal. As important as this is in music, it is even more important in building a healthy pastoral team.

A healthy pastoral team is made of godly, qualified pastors who are functioning in a biblical plurality. In our zeal for the second half of that sentence (a plurality) we must not neglect the even greater priority of the first half (godly, qualified pastors).

Thinking of a pastoral team as healthy just because they have more than one pastor is like thinking of a bunch of novice musicians as a good band because they are interested in music and play together frequently. Actually, it's more dangerous, because each pastor, and the team as a whole, are representing the Chief Shepherd himself.

In order to guard against that danger, let's review the three categories of pastoral qualifications.

1. *Christian Maturity*

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. (1 Tim. 3:1–7)

To be a pastor, one must not be a new convert to Christianity, and one must be a faithful, though not perfect, example of Christian character. This requirement should never be an assumption in our training of new pastors, nor should it be neglected as we assess our own Christian walk and the walk of our fellow pastors.

The modern ministry world is often infected with a worldly view of “success”—emphasizing publications, leadership role, church size, and staff size over character. But if we want to know what God wants—we should give attention to his standards of character for his undershepherds.

The greatest speaker, influencer, thought leader, organizer, motivator, recruiter, or counselor in the world may be able to benefit many different types of secular organizations, but if he steadfastly lacks Christian maturity, he should not be a pastor. Commentaries and excellent resources exist to study all of the relevant passages regarding pastoral qualifications for the pastor, so there is no need for a detailed teaching here.

But here is the point: God has called pastors to model Christian maturity. Competence should never outrank character in pastoral

qualification. Pastoral teams should prize and encourage the ongoing pursuit of Christian maturity among each other. Let us not preach to others, and then find, in the end, that we are disqualified.

This category of qualification is not meant to be an anvil held over the head of every pastor in the ongoing battle with sin that every Christian leader fights every day. It is meant to remind us that God has called pastors to lead by example, and to keep us on our knees before the cross of Christ, seeking his grace and power for our ongoing pursuit of godliness.

2. Pastoral Character

Of course, godliness should be evident in every aspect of our pastoral ministry, but our ministry must have a particular disposition as well. What I have in view here is the way pastors relate to the church. Here are a few Scriptures that speak to the qualification I have in mind:

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 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.” (Mark 10:42–45)

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 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. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility

toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (1 Pet. 5:1–5)

For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. (1 Thess. 2:5–10)

Our ministry must have a particular shape, a quality, a disposition. A qualified pastor is not just a godly man; he pastors in a Biblical manner. This includes a servant-hearted humility, a sober expectation of the Lord’s evaluation, a gentleness with the flock, a joyful willingness to serve in this office, and a courage to speak the truth without fear for the good of God’s people. As John Piper would say, “Brothers, we are not professionals.”⁷

Our work manual is not obtained from the business section of a book store; and our manner of work must conform to those Scriptures which describe faithful pastoral ministry. We must pastor eagerly, joyfully, humbly, reverently, gently, and courageously, if we are to

7. John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002).

be biblical shepherds. And if we do not have biblical shepherds, we do not have a biblical pastoral team.

3. Pastoral Competence

This section is placed third on purpose, because of the temptation to place it first in modern evangelical culture. Yet, it must be included, because a pastor cannot only be a godly man, or only maintain the right pastoral disposition. He must also be gifted to fulfill the tasks of a shepherd.

The pastor is called to a role that includes teaching, leadership, and care. He is to be a shepherd that skillfully leads his flock to the green pastures of God's Word, that warns them of dangers present in the world and in their hearts, and that guards them from false teachers. Paul's requirement that an aspiring elder must be "able to teach" does not mean that he has to be a fantastic orator, but that he be able to effectively communicate the truths of the faith (and especially the gospel) to the flock.

According to Ephesians 4, the pastor/teacher's job is to equip the saints for the work of service. Hebrews says they keep watch over the flock. Paul tells Timothy to stop false teachers from teaching any different doctrine. He also instructs those who lead to do so with zeal. All of this requires competence.

A healthy pastoral team cannot be comprised of godly men who are not gifted to serve in these ways. A godly leadership team that is not gifted would surely be better than an ungodly leadership team that is very gifted, yet neither are what God has given to his people. This also has relevance as we consider adding or removing men from the pastoral team. Is this man godly? Will he demonstrate biblical pastoral character toward the church? Is he able to fulfill the full duties of the biblical office?

Praise God when such a man is found—he is a gift to the church! And may God give us grace to gently and graciously call men to

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grow or eventually to step down from this role if they are not men of maturity, character, and competence.

Biblical pastoral teams require biblically qualified pastors. I am grateful for the many faithful pastors I have worked among over the years, and hopeful for the many others that the Lord will raise up in the years to come.

THINKING LIKE A SHEPHERD

I have a small clock in my office that my dad gave me. The clock is inscribed with Psalm 78:72: “And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them” (NIV). Of course, the most important application of this psalm is that the Lord Jesus, the new David, is the great shepherd of his people. He is the one who shepherds pastors as well, and we can bring our every burden to him. He skillfully leads us beside still waters and to green pastures. He restores our souls. He will surely care for his precious sheep, pastors and members alike, until he leads all of us home.

A Metaphor of Ministry

But, since my dad is a pastoral hero to me, and since he gave this clock to me in connection to my role in pastoral ministry, there is another application. The Lord Jesus chose to use the very same metaphor of shepherd to describe those who are responsible to care for his people. Consider his restoration of Peter in John 21:

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know

that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” (John 21:15–18)

The Bible repeatedly describes God’s people as a flock of sheep, and the Lord Jesus picked up this metaphor by calling himself the “Good Shepherd” (John 10:11). It is not surprising then that “shepherd” is a crucial metaphor used for those human leaders that God has called to lead and care for his people. It is not the only metaphor—construction and agricultural work also come to mind—but no other metaphor is more important. As Peter writes in his first epistle: “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you” (1 Pet. 5:2).

A Humbling and Inspiring Standard

To function as shepherds is a humbling, shaping, and inspiring standard for our pastoral teams. It is humbling because shepherds are not, and never have been, the pinnacle of cultural prominence. God did not describe his New Testament servants as kings, or princes, or generals, but as shepherds. We are not meant to think of ourselves as the top of an empire or the head of an army, but rather as a steward entrusted with a long-term and non-glamorous duty.

Pastors are leaders, but we guide and lead by example rather than driving and leading by demand. We are caregivers, but we care by bringing the flock to the resources of God’s Word and calling them to live by His Spirit, not through human counsel and advice. We are not above the flock, but among them. We are not apart from the flock but with them. We share with them the pains and difficulties of life in exile from our homeland and we face with them the dangers of wolves who threaten the flock.

We are not the shepherds of only the strong or only the weak, only the wandering or only the mature, but the entire flock is under our

watchful gaze. And we are not herding horses or using oxen, swift and energetic or strong and productive, but sheep, who slowly walk along the path set for them by the Great Shepherd. This metaphor shapes us and guards us from whatever military or corporate or governmental models we might be prone to use as a pastoral team.

This metaphor also inspires us, because it means that we are called to reflect the Good Shepherd himself. He has given us the very same illustration he used for himself, which gives glory to every moment of self-sacrifice and sobriety to every pastoral failure. These are his sheep, purchased by his own blood, and he has temporarily entrusted them to our earthly care. There is no more honorable title that a leader in the church could aspire to than to be the undershepherd of Christ's own flock.

What a privilege, to be a part of a team of shepherds in the flock of Christ. We can picture ourselves standing together in our spiritual vigil during the long night of this world, until the morning comes and Christ takes us home. What an honor to help each other in this sacred task, standing with doctrinal vigilance, courage against wolves, and gentleness with the lambs, along with our brothers-shepherds.

Shepherding together is the right way for a pastoral team to understand their calling in the church.

DON'T CUT THE OFFICE IN HALF

Why have I chosen rowing as a guiding metaphor for pastoral teams? I don't personally know anyone who has been on rowing team. Do you? Why not choose a more popular sport, like baseball, or football, or basketball? The lead pastor is like a quarterback, the youth pastor is like a wide receiver, the executive pastor is like, uh, a point guard. Everyone plays their position well and the team wins. Right? Or maybe a corporate metaphor would be better. The lead pastor is the CEO, the family pastor is the Director of Human Resources, the evangelism pastor is . . . the sales team.

The limitation with these other sports and business metaphors is that they don't fit the biblical principle of a single office. On a rowing team, the men who are rowing are all doing the same essential job, though their position in the boat is based on their varied strengths and weaknesses in that job. They all row, but they do have some distinctions in their best position for rowing.

A Single Office

In Scripture, the governing office of a church is described in different terms, but all refer to the same fundamental job. I won't walk through all of the biblical passages that make this point, but it is worth looking at Paul's instructions to the Ephesian elders as a refresher:

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. (Acts 20:28)

Paul calls the elders of Ephesus to come to him, and then tells them that God has made them overseers, responsible to care for (pastor/shepherd) the flock. Notice that all of the elders are also called overseers and are called to pastor. What we do not see is a distinction between elders and pastors, or between some elders and others in terms of their fundamental role. They are all called to the same office.

We see the same pattern in 1 Peter 5:1–2:

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 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. (1 Pet. 5:1–2)

Once again the elders are called to shepherd the flock, exercising spiritual oversight. Rather than calling elders to govern, pastors to care, and overseers to manage, Peter calls the same group of men to each fulfill a single office comprised of three tasks.

What about 1 Timothy 5:17?

Some might argue that 1 Timothy 5:17 contradicts this point and describes two different types of elders. It reads: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17). This passage has been used to justify a distinction between “ruling elders” (those who govern), and “teaching elders” (those who teach, and often are on the church staff). However, I would respectfully disagree on both points. Note the structure of the sentence: *all* the elders who “rule well,” and not just “those who labor in preaching and teaching,” are worthy of “double honor”—likely referring to some kind of monetary compensation for their labors.

Also, the passage does not say that the other elders do not teach, but rather that some are given to the labor of preaching and teaching.

Can it really be that Paul meant to say that some elders do not preach the Word in season and out of season, do not refute false doctrine, do not feed the flock, and do not teach people to obey all that Christ commended? Surely not.

The best way to reconcile this passage with Acts 20, 1 Peter 5, and other scriptures about pastoral ministry is not to discover here two different offices. It should be noted that the Greek word for especially (*malista*) can also be translated “namely,” which could mean that all elders are worthy of double honor because they all labor in preaching and teaching. Or, it could be that this text envisions a distinction in accent within the one office. Either way, Paul is not introducing to Timothy (at this late stage!), a new structure of leadership in such an ambiguous way.

The principle of a single office is why I don’t think a baseball or football team (or a business) is the best metaphor for the operations of a pastoral team. Of course, pastors have different gifts within their office, but they do not have different offices; they do not occupy a fundamentally different “position.” All are called to provide spiritual leadership and oversight, through the means of teaching and care.

Rather than belabor the exegetical point, let me share three applications that could be overlooked even as we affirm this principle.

Three Applications

First, pastors should not be radically specialized. Pastors do have different gifts and teams delegate particular priorities to different team members, especially as a pastoral team grows. However, this goes too far if a pastor is so focused on governance that he never teaches, or so focused on teaching that he has no voice in leadership, or so focused on outreach and evangelism that he gives little thought to the spiritual care for church members.

All that each pastor is called to by Scripture should be present at some level in the job description of each pastor. To reiterate, this is not a critique of specialization or delegation or leadership structure

on a pastoral team! But it is a caution against making a pastor less than a pastor. Don't cut the office in half.

Second, this principle means that we must assess the addition of a pastor/elder on the basis of the full requirements of pastoral ministry. There are many godly men in a healthy church that could provide excellent counsel in governance, or provide excellent care in counseling, or provide outstanding teaching in an occasional doctrinal class. But such men should not be elders if they are only doing one of these functions. They may be pillars in the church, but they should not be elders.

This should caution us as we evaluate bi-vocational candidates as well. Does this candidate have the time to participate in the eldership meetings for governance decisions and contribute to the teaching diet whether in small settings or large? And can he do so while remaining faithful to his marriage and children? If so, praise God! He has provided a pastoral gift to the church and to the pastoral team. But if not, we must not diminish the office of elder in order to affirm a man who should simply be encouraged to exercise his specialized gift in the church.

Third, the principle of a single office should serve to humble pastors toward their team and motivate pastors to keep growing in all of the elements of pastoral ministry. Experienced pastors do well to remember that though they may have more hard-earned wisdom, they do not occupy a higher office than those men who have joined a plurality recently. And younger pastors must not rate one aspect of pastoring (probably where they are gifted) as more important than others; they should continue to learn wholistic pastoring from the elder statesmen on the team.

The principle of a single office deserves ongoing study as we progress through the years of pastoral ministry, giving us guidance and protection as we make operational decisions, craft job descriptions, and walk through the variety of team structures that a team creates

over the years. This principle both frees us and restrains us to be the pastors, and therefore the pastoral team, that God has called us to be.

THE TEAM'S BURDEN

Mission Cross of Community Logos Church is having some normal church problems. (Yes, they need a new name. And no, this is not a real church.) But, beyond their name issue, their church is experiencing some division, some worldliness, and on top of that, people still aren't showing up until the third song on Sunday morning.

Mr. I-Was-Just-Joking keeps offending people in his community group, and Mrs. I-Just-Have-To-Be-Honest keeps pointing out her disagreement with the sermon points on Twitter. The youth ministry is doing a great job in outreach, but is struggling to cultivate maturity. Also, there's a leak in the roof, and the deacon in charge of roof leaks needs help for his roof team. And the church is almost finished with a long series in John and needs a new sermon plan for next month.

Now, pause the picture for a moment. Who is responsible for MCCLC? Ultimately the Lord has this church in his own hands, and he will continue to work in them by his patient grace. And each Christian bears responsibility for the church, to build it up and serve it with love. But who has leadership responsibility for this church? Who is meant to address these current needs? At an earthly level, who is *pastorally* responsible for the church?

Team Responsibility Fallacies

The way we answer this question makes all the difference in how we function as a pastoral team. Let's consider some team responsibility fallacies that are easy to adopt.

1. The Senior/Lead Pastor is Exclusively Responsible

We might label this the “pass the buck” fallacy. Because there is a legitimate place for lead/senior pastors, we might relate to that role like a CEO or a captain of a ship. Everyone else does their job, but he’s responsible for the whole thing and no one else is. Sometimes both lead pastors and non-lead pastors live with this fallacy, leading to team dysfunction, burnout, or lead pastor isolation and vulnerability.

2. None of the Pastors are Responsible, They’re Just Employees/Volunteers

Because vocational pastors do receive compensation from the church, they can sometimes succumb to the idea that they just work for an organization and that they don’t have any more responsibility for the church than an ordinary employee does to a secular business. This fallacy can lead to the kinds of behavior that might happen in the secular work force—abrupt departures, passivity toward broad church problems, apathy toward team unity, or ambition toward other “better” roles that might come along.

This mentality can also affect bi-vocational pastors, who might view themselves as a temporary volunteer, while viewing the vocational pastors, or perhaps the church organization, as having ultimate responsibility.

3. Each Pastor is Responsible Only for Their Part of the Church

We might label this the “silo” fallacy. In this view each pastor has a certain section of members or a certain number of ministries in this church and he is fully responsible for those and not responsible for anything else. He may give advice on other members or ministries but he is not pastorally responsible for their spiritual health.

4. Each Pastor is as Fully Pastorally Responsible as a Solo Pastor Would Be

Call this the “everyone is a CEO” fallacy. In this view each pastor relates to every decision, every ministry direction, every assessment of church health as if he will answer to the Lord for it personally, regardless of the rest of the pastoral team. If someone on the pastoral team is doing something, this man might as well be doing it himself. There is no differentiation between his personal responsibility and the responsibility of the team as a whole. This can lead to intense struggles of conscience and team conflict.

Governance by Plurality

The problem with all of these fallacies is that they are based on secular leadership assumptions rather than on the clear pattern of Scripture for pastoral plurality. The New Testament picture, taken as a whole, is that the spiritual governance of the church resides in the plurality of elders in submission to Christ and his Word. Pastoral responsibility does not reside in one elder in superiority to all the others nor does it reside in each elder independently of the others; it resides in elders functioning in plurality. The team leads the church.

Of course, each pastor will receive individual evaluation and commendation from the Lord for his pastoral effort. And a pastor cannot hide behind an unfaithful team; where a team is clearly violating Scripture a pastor should resign rather than passively commend their actions by his continued presence. But in a healthy team, this conclusion provides value and protection for the church and for each elder.

“Team responsibility” both elevates and humbles the contribution of each elder on the team. No elder may disregard his participation in this team responsibility, but no elder may function as an authoritative singularity. This releases elders from feeling ultimate and isolated responsibility for the entire church on their own and also holds them to genuine and faithful participation in the decision-making process and the pastoral burden of the team.

In the wisdom of the Lord, and with due respect given to heroic solo pastors, the Biblical pattern shows a team of qualified men, rowing in their ecclesiastical boat, each responsible for the good of the whole, and yet each depending on and deferring to his brothers.

So who is responsible to help Mission Cross of Community Logos Church grow in the grace of God? And who is responsible for my church, or yours? The pastoral team is. They must feel the burden together, and work together to care for the sheep. A myriad of implications flow from this conclusion, which we will continue to examine.

ROWERS WITH DIFFERENT GIFTS

Let's go back to Mission Cross of Community Logos Church. We've affirmed that the whole pastoral team is responsible for the spiritual health of the church. We've affirmed that each pastor should fulfill the full biblical description of pastoral ministry. But what does this mean for actually addressing the pastoral needs present in the church? Is the whole team supposed to be at every meeting, directly involved in every ministry project, talking together to every deacon? No, another category is needed, which we can label Delegation According to Gifting.

Strategic Delegation

As churches grow, the need for strategic delegation on the pastoral team grows as well. Many churches look to the business world as a model for structure, but this can lead to unbiblical and unhealthy practices. We should look instead to the structure of the church as a whole as referenced in 1 Corinthians 12 and to the hints that we have of the way ministry teams functioned together in the New Testament.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul categorically forbids condescension or self-pity in the body of Christ. All contributions are to be valued in the church. This is the same perspective that Paul uses in Romans 12 and that Peter uses in 1 Peter 4:10. Rather than looking to the business or military world for our fundamental perspective on team structure, I would appeal that we start from these passages regarding the body of Christ.

A pastoral team is comprised of men who all have the same office, and the same basic shepherding responsibility, but who will have

distinctive gifts within that calling that should be referenced in delegating individual responsibilities to each team member.

Should all of the team be involved in some form of teaching? Yes, but some pastors may have a greater, clearer, or more anointed gift of public teaching than others. Ideally, this should form a larger part of their day-to-day job description.

Should all of the team be involved in governance? Yes, but some pastors have a stronger leadership gift, or gift of guidance for the spiritual direction of the church. Ideally, he, or they, should take a stronger role in initiating or proposing the high-level direction for the church.

Should all of the pastors be involved in seeking the lost sheep, or caring for the weak sheep? Of course, but some pastors have a greater passion or gifting in these areas than others. Ideally, they should be given more responsibilities in this direction.

The principles of “one office” and “team responsibility” should not be taken to mean that pastors have the identical job description, any more than our union in Christ means that every Christian should serve the church in exactly the same way.

Actually, one gets the sense that this was true for the early church leaders through various hints in the New Testament record. Paul is obviously known for his unmatched intellect, but was not necessarily “famous” for his preaching. Timothy had a certain gift imparted to him during a time of prayer, but he had to be exhorted to courage in leading the church. Barnabas had a gift for new or young men in the faith, raising them up toward greater ministry. Peter, and then James, had a leadership gift that stood out among the plurality of leaders in Jerusalem.

Studying these hints and the fundamental way God has comprised the body of Christ should compel us to consider the best plan of delegating various aspects of pastoral leadership and care to different members of a pastoral team.

Viewing the Team as a Body

This means that the pastoral team is not like a governmental or business hierarchy, with members hoping to “ascend” to a higher level of value or importance. They are more like a rowing team, with each member responsible for the same office, but placed in different places on the boat according to the accent in pastoral gifting that God has given them.

Of course, no pastor can only serve where he is particularly gifted; we are all called in some way or another to operate in our weaknesses. But viewing ourselves as a body aligns our structure more closely with the main biblical paradigm for the use of gifts in the church.

This perspective should also increase our gratefulness and dependence on the other team members, as those who contribute to the team and church in ways that complement our own gifts. In my experience, most pastors are strong in one or two areas of pastoral ministry, average in one or two areas, and weak or simply sufficient in one or two areas. In some cases, pastors are extremely strong in one pastoral area and extremely weak (just qualified) in others.

We might think of a person who has an incredible preaching gift, but is just sufficient in the comforting personal care that a shepherd should provide. Another man is extremely gifted with the lost or with weak Christians, but is more limited in his gift of equipping the flock through strategic leadership. One pastor has a deep grasp of theology; another has a profound ability to raise up new leaders.

No pastor should be so arrogant as to assume that they have strengths in all the pastoral gifts necessary to care well for the church. And no pastor should minimize the gifts God has given him to contribute to the team.

This principle can guard a team from a host of dangerous expectations, ambitions, stagnation, and confusion. It helps us to row with joy when all of our fellow pastors are in the right place on the boat.

A LEADER AMONG LEADERS

So, back at MCCLC the roof still needs to be fixed, the new sermon series proposed, and various pastoral needs in the church need to be addressed. (And they really need to make progress on a new name.) We've established that the whole team is pastorally responsible for all of these problems, but . . . where do they go from here? Who focuses on each need? Who starts the conversation? Which need should take priority?

Though all pastors are overseers, called to lead and govern the church, the New Testament also indicates that some pastors are given a particular leadership role among their fellows. We notice this pattern in Peter's initiative in Acts 1 in leading the church to replace Judas among the apostles. We also notice Peter's leadership when he stands up in front of the curious crowd to interpret Pentecost and to call them to repentance. Later in Acts, James takes a decisive role in the church in Jerusalem when the council is gathered to discuss the question of the Gentiles and circumcision. It seems clear that Timothy would have taken a leadership role when he arrived in Ephesus, though obviously there were other elders present.

These clues should not erase the principle of team responsibility or weaken the shared office that all of the local pastors hold equally. However, as a team assesses their various gifts, they will be wise to note that one of their number may have a stronger gift of leadership than the rest. In delegating their various responsibilities, the team should begin by delegating a role of team leadership to that pastor.

This leadership is not a higher authority (authority resides in the team) and this leader ultimately serves in this role at the pleasure

of and in submission to the team. Yet, his leadership ability can be a great gift to the fruitfulness and unity of the team as they process the needs of the church together.

The Role of Lead Pastor

Normally, a lead pastor will exhibit a combination of theological discernment, motivational ability, preaching ability, and team coordination ability. And in all of these gifts, this man should have a gift of decisiveness that enables him to assess various needs with relative efficiency and to propose a course of action that others are willing to follow. This doesn't mean that all of the best ideas come from him—rather that he takes the initiative in garnering ideas from his team and often casts vision for the most important priorities of a church in a given season. He also must be willing to lead toward difficult conversations and decisions, or even unpopular directions, for the health of the church.

The lead pastor should be able to discern the high level theological and pastoral needs of the church, in dependence on the whole team's observations, and then coordinate the team conversation in coming up with a plan to address those problems. Often this pastor has skill in discerning the best way for the team members to be positioned so that all can function according to their primary gifts for the good of the church. Normally, the best person to lead the team is the person whose gifts cause the gifts of the rest of the team to flourish.

Since the public preaching of God's Word on Sunday is the highlight of the church's week and the driving force behind the church's pastoral vision, it is usually valuable if the lead pastor can be the strongest or most experienced preacher on the pastoral team.

The precise expression of leadership will be unique to each lead pastor and to the needs of each pastoral team and church. However, this gift can provide a profound help to a team of pastors and, exercised well, can cause the team to grow in unity and fruitfulness.

In our fictional church with all of the problems, here is one way it might work:

- In MCCLC the lead pastor, Jim, called a pastoral meeting. He had noted that the team seemed discouraged by the church's recent challenges so he asked Bill, the most gifted encourager on the pastoral team, to share a brief devotional regarding God's faithfulness to his church.
- Jim followed the devotional by expressing his gratefulness for the team's perseverance and his recommendation that the church (and the team) needed a fresh focus on joy in Christ in light of some of the difficulties and character problems they were seeing in the congregation.
- He recommended that the team start a teaching series in Philippians, and he asked Bill if he would be willing to come up with a plan for encouraging people to arrive earlier on Sunday to engage in corporate worship. The team discussed the proposal for a while, considered a few other preaching options, but ultimately decided to affirm Jim's Philippians plan.
- Jim then asked Scott, the most administratively gifted pastor, to lead a conversation regarding the state of the deacon team in the church. After hearing from Scott and the other pastors, Jim asked Scott if he would be willing to lead the team at their next meeting through a proposal regarding recruiting deacons for the future, especially related to their building needs.
- Finally, Jim asked Jack, the pastor who had been leading the youth ministry, for his evaluation of some of the immaturity the team had been noticing among the young people in the church. Jack became emotional in the meeting, and expressed his discouragement at the worldliness he was seeing among the young people. Jim led the team in taking a moment to encourage Jack and to pray for him, and then he asked Bill to meet with Jack to work together with him on a proposal to

bring to a future meeting for addressing these pastoral needs among the youth.

- Finally, Jim asked all of the guys if they could set aside a Saturday in June to spend a lengthy time discussing their need for a new church name. He urged the guys to spend some time thinking about the most important theological and pastoral identities of their church and he said he would send out some name ideas in the coming weeks for their consideration.

Of course, not all meetings go so well! And lead pastors may not all lead in exactly the way that Jim did. But the essential qualities of initiative, theological discernment, and coordination are a major part of the gifting that should be present in a man chosen to lead the team.

Lead Pastor Fallacies

Before I close this chapter, though, let me share some unwise views of the lead pastor role that can wreak havoc on a pastoral team. These are some of the primary lead pastor fallacies.

1. The Lead-Pastor-in-Name-Only Fallacy

Sometimes a pastoral team can technically affirm the concept of a lead pastor but can be so concerned about the equal authority of the team that they are reluctant (or opposed) to him exercising any kind of real leadership on the team. If he initiates, they constantly remind him that every pastor can initiate. If he seeks to lead the team toward a decision, they remind him that he doesn't have unique authority. They don't feel they can move toward a decision unless the team is unanimous and they are fearful of being overly deferential to the lead pastor's ideas.

Sometimes, this fallacy is not so much due to a team's disposition as it is to a lead pastor himself. He doesn't want to step on any toes, so his ideas are often timid, and his coordination is highly deferential or even apologetic. He immediately surrenders any idea that meets with

pushback from the team and feels helpless to ask any team member to defer to the rest of the team on a non-doctrinal decision.

Sometimes teams (or lead pastors) like this need to receive encouragement from a trusted extra-local leader. Sometimes their dysfunction is due to a former authoritarian leader or to a view of plurality that does not consider the value of the “body metaphor” in 1 Corinthians 12. A team’s authority does not need to be threatened when they delegate leadership to the most gifted leader among them. They can still “override” him if necessary, but they will benefit if they allow him to exercise his leadership gift for the good of the team, supporting his initiative with intelligent and humble team conversation and input wherever possible.

2. The Lead-Pastor-is-the-Best-at-Everything Fallacy

This fallacy can plague both lead pastors and their teams and can lead to devastating team conflict and dysfunction. This is the idea that the lead pastor is the lead pastor because he is the best pastor on the team. It can also include the idea that the lead pastor is responsible to fulfill all of the elements of pastoring that the team needs to function.

So, he should provide pastoral care and spiritual accountability to the team (and he should be pretty good at it). He should administrate the team (and he should be well organized, prepared, and decisive). He should be strong in reading, in intelligence, in evangelism, and in relational skill because the team looks to him to lead in all of those areas. He’s the lead pastor precisely because he is the best pastor on the team (and if he’s clearly not, one wonders why he is the lead pastor!?).

In reality, no pastor is actually this gifted in this many areas (at least I’ve never met one), so this fallacy can lead to depression in the lead pastor and to disillusionment on the team.

The better way to view the lead pastor is that he is strongest in leadership (and probably theological discernment and preaching), but he may be the weakest on the team in a number of other pastoral gifts. He should not put himself forward as the best example on the

team in every area and the team should not be disappointed when they encounter his areas of pastoral weakness.

Actually, a strong evidence of his leadership is that he is aware of his weaknesses and is quick to celebrate and point the team to the greater gifting of other team members in various pastoral needs. Perhaps another team member should be responsible for team care, or for organizing pastoral meetings, or for leading the church in evangelism, under the encouraging coordination of the lead pastor.

3. The Lead-Pastor-as-the-Top-of-the-Pastoral-Ladder Fallacy

This fallacy comes directly from the business and military world. It views pastoral ministry as a ladder of professional advancement, in which some roles are “entry roles” and others are “advanced roles” of greater authority and importance. This fallacy plays on the sinful tendencies of ambition that every pastor must fight and can lead to contention and coveting among a pastoral team.

Of course, a pastor’s job description on a pastoral team might change over the years, depending on the development of his gifts, his growing experience, the make-up of the pastoral team, and the changing needs of the church. But pastoral ministry is NOT a ladder of achievement. A pastor should not view the lead pastor role as something he is trying to “attain” but rather as a particular gift that he may or may not have in distinction from his brothers.

Rather than viewing some pastoral gifts as “lower” and others “higher,” a pastor should evaluate himself (as Paul would say) with sober judgment. Perhaps he is the most gifted counselor on the team. If so, he should view being the best counselor as his pastoral goal. Perhaps he is highly gifted in evangelism or administration—he should seek to be the best pastor God has called him to be in utilizing those gifts.

To go back to the rowing analogy, the man whose body is built for the front of the boat should not be ambitious for the day he can finally sit in the back. And the man built best for the middle should

not crave the front. The leadership gift is just one gift of a number that are needed on a pastoral team. We should gladly be what God has made us to be in joyful service among our pastoral brothers.

When these fallacies are avoided and the team makes a prayerful and faith-filled decision to delegate this lead role to one of their number, the team and the church can benefit and flourish. As Paul communicated to the Corinthians, God arranged the parts of the body, each one of them, as he chose. The goal is that all should rejoice together and celebrate the gifts, including the gift of leadership, that are given by the Spirit of the Lord for the good of his people.

Summary of Section 1

The Theology of Pastoring Together

This opening section surveys the key theological principles that undergird a healthy, biblical pastoral team. The purpose of studying these principles is not merely to reaffirm our current practice, but to rejuvenate our joy and reform our teams wherever necessary toward greater health and biblical conformity. Though pastoral teams are all different, comprised of men with differing gifting, leading churches with different needs, all pastoral teams should seek to comply to these principles with affection and faith.

I commend the ongoing study of these principles to you, lest our teams suffer the danger of presumption and our churches pay the price. May the Lord give every pastor who reads this opening section fresh joy in their calling to a pastoral team.

Yet these principles of pastoring will be fruitful only if the men on the team exhibit character that reflects the gospel in their lives. Section two of this book is devoted to the character we must cultivate toward our fellow shepherds.

Section 2

The Character of Pastoring Together

Principles and practices are valuable, but without godly character a pastoral team will fall to ruin. The Lord Jesus calls his undershepherds to look like him, and we cannot look like him only when relating to church members—we must look like him when relating to one another. That is the focus of this section: godly character, not just in our personal lives, but in our relationships with fellow pastors. We can't cover every biblical trait of godliness, but I have found six traits that are especially crucial for “the boys in the boat” to be what they are meant to be. My prayer is that these chapters will alert teams to particular virtues that deserve regular, rich meditation.

GRATITUDE: THANK GOD FOR FELLOW PASTORS!

How grateful was the Apostle Paul? Very, very grateful. All. The. Time. And for whom was he grateful? Anyone joined in the partnership of the gospel—definitely including, with special affection, his co-laborers in Christ.

To the church in Philippi, Paul writes, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (Phil. 1:3–5). To his partners in Thessalonica, he says, “For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God?” (1 Thess. 3:9). Paul expresses heartfelt gratitude for Timothy and Titus, for Epaphras, Tychicus, Luke, and others.

Paul does not give us this personal example just for our historical awareness of his practices. He wants us to follow his lead! We must shape our team atmosphere in such a way that if Paul were to join us, his gratefulness would fit right in with our regular relationships with each other. My brothers, rowing in your own church boats, we must be grateful for our fellow pastors. Gratefulness is a key evidence that our hearts are humbled by God’s grace in our life and that we are cultivating a sense of privilege at our salvation and our role in shepherding God’s people. Moreover, gratefulness for our fellow shepherds means we are cultivating the discipline of worshiping God for his grace at work in their lives for the benefit of the church and ourselves.

A grateful pastoral team is positioned for unity and spiritual fruitfulness. An ungrateful pastoral team is an unhealthy pastoral team and usually is headed toward trouble.

Hindrances to Gratitude

Gratefulness does not always come easily to a pastoral team, for a few reasons.

First, we are all naturally self-centered and more aware of ourselves and our pastoral reputation and our ministry dreams and discouragements than we are of others. Like many of our sins, this sin begins in the heart and mind. We may be avoiding overtly selfish acts while allowing our mind to circle around the question of our own reputation and prominence and jealousies and fears due to the self-centeredness of our hearts. This sinful tendency wages war against gratefulness. Our ordination does not purify our arrogance or our self-focus and pastoral teams are not immune from presumptuous expectations and demanding hearts.

Second, we are shepherds, and the flock requires a lot of effort. In our ministry busyness, we can sometimes forget to meditate on the gift of pastoring together and returning that gift to the Lord in gratefulness. In a modern church world that worships productivity and pragmatism, gratefulness seems like a waste of time. But a team neglecting gratefulness will eventually fail in a conflict that may wipe out years of their previous efforts. And worse, all of their productivity will not be pleasing to the Lord if they are not keeping their hearts grateful toward God. Those who do not regularly give thanks to God are more like the world under God's condemnation than like the church of Jesus Christ.

Third, all pastors are sinful and have areas of weakness in ministry. We are tempted to be more aware of the failings of our fellow pastors than of the good things that God has put in them and done through them. When we are disappointed by a fellow pastor's laziness, it's hard to remain grateful for their kindness. When we are hurt by a

pastor's unkind moment, it's hard to remain grateful for their gift of decisiveness. Or, in trying to help others grow, we think that severity is more motivating than kindness—though this is not how the Lord relates to each of us. The temptation to complain looms before us, inviting us to indulge in self-righteous distance or pharisaical rebuke, but gratefulness keeps our eyes fixed on God's supreme grace at work in the heart of every fellow pastor.

Gifts from the Lord

We must remember that pastoring with other men who love the Lord and love the flock is not a right or something we've earned. It is a gift. Just ask that dear brother who has labored as a solo pastor for his entire life. Nor should a cynicism about past or potential team conflict keep us from gratefulness in the present.

The Lord is at work in these fellow pastors, imperfect as they are. They are the gifts of the risen Christ to his church, and we ought to model gratefulness to Christ for these gifts. We ought to be returning to him our appreciation for his mercy in giving us this brother with his preaching gift, or that one with his counseling ability. And even that solo pastor ought to be grateful that he does not ultimately labor alone in the body of Christ. Pastors in extra-local partnership ought to be a cause for our gratefulness to the Lord as well.

It's vital to note that gratefulness is not flattery or human boasting. Pastors are gifts from the Lord and ultimately our gratefulness resounds to him. But let us be like Paul, and allow our fellow pastors and our church to hear us thanking the Lord for the gifts that they are.

I cannot urge upon us strongly enough the priority of this character trait for a pastoral team. Gratefulness produces encouragement, provides the context for appropriate correction, gives endurance for persevering ministry, is an example for the church, and creates a New Testament atmosphere in our pastoral team.

The grateful team is a team that reflects well on the gospel of Jesus Christ, who has lavished us with grace. Let us, this week, this Sunday,

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this month, at the next retreat, over the hard seasons and the abundant seasons, devote ourselves to gratefulness for our fellow pastors.

“I am so grateful to the Lord for you, because . . .” should perhaps be the most repeated words of pastoral conversation.

FAITH: CONFIDENCE IN THE GRACE OF GOD

I listened to it over and over and over. It was on a cassette tape (to date my age!) and I had it in my car. I would just pick up where I had left off and listen to a few more minutes during each drive.

C. J. Mahaney had given the message at a Sovereign Grace Pastors Conference. It was titled “Grace and the Adventure of Leadership.” It was based on 1 Corinthians 1 where Paul, shockingly, encourages and celebrates his hope for the Corinthian church, in spite of their weaknesses and sins, as described in the next 15 chapters.

C. J., in his inimitable style, made the point effectively: pastors must cultivate a divine perspective of those they are serving. We must have faith in God’s power that supersedes our awareness of the faults and challenges facing us. I don’t believe there is a week (and probably not a day) that goes by where the truth of that passage doesn’t shape me.

Remembering the Promises of Christ

Pastors need faith to pastor effectively. *And we need faith to pastor together.* The same perspective of God’s promises, the same confidence in his grace that should shape our view of our congregation should also shape our view of our fellow pastors.

Pastoring together is hard work. Whether we are working with full-time pastors or part-time pastors or unpaid pastors. Whether we are pastoring with long-time partners in ministry or pastors just recently ordained.

Pastoring together is hard work, first of all, because pastoring is hard work. The church of Christ is sinful; Christ’s sheep need

constant care, and good shepherding is a long journey that requires an eternal vision.

Pastors need to encourage one another in that eternal, divine perspective, and I find the benefit of encouraging each other's faith to be one of the crucial components of a healthy pastoral team. Sometimes my eyes drift to the waves, and I need a fellow pastor's voice to lift my gaze to the Savior again. Sometimes his steps are weak and his heart is heavy, and he needs me to bring reminders of Christ's promises to lighten his load. Speaking the promises that build faith should be our regular team pastime.

Pastoring together also requires faith because we are prone to be more aware of the weaknesses and sins of our fellow pastors than the promises of Christ about this fellow shepherd. Like gratefulness, enduring faith requires the discipline of lifting our eyes to the Lord. Working next to pastors and sharing the responsibility of the church causes us to feel the cost of their limitations and sins. Sometimes their weaknesses get blamed on the whole team, and we share in their embarrassment. Sometimes our sins make their hard week even harder. No team is immune from this reality. Everyone of us will burden our fellow pastors with our ongoing weaknesses and tempt them with our sins. And we will be burdened and tempted in return.

Without faith, sharing the shepherding with fellow pastors will lead to grumbling, unresolved conflict, and eventually, to joylessness and discouragement. These frustrations have spilled over into countless congregations, leading to division and church splits. They have caused many Christians the pain of seeing their leaders unable to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Faith Enlivens our Work

We at Sovereign Grace would do well to heed Charles Bridges' well-loved advice for pastors: "It is faith that enlivens our work with

perpetual cheerfulness.”⁸ And we must apply all that we know about faith toward our fellow pastors.

- Yes, that pastor is weak in administration and sometimes lazy, but he is seeking to grow, and we can have faith that the Lord will strengthen him until the end of his race.
- Yes, that pastor sometimes struggles with impatience in long-term counseling, but we can have faith the Lord will give him the patience he needs to be steadfast in caring for the sheep.
- Yes, here is that pastor who seems to need more preparation for public speaking than others, but we can have faith that the Lord will use his efforts to sow the Word into the hearts of his people.
- Yes, here is that pastor who struggles with self-pity, and needs to be reminded again that his identity is found in the Lord and not in the opinions of others.
- And yes, here am I, with my limitations and my sins that my brother pastors have to endure time and again, but the Lord can give them faith to see God’s good purpose for this jar of clay, this rescued sinner.

Brothers, we must have faith toward our fellow pastors and where it is lacking we must go back to gazing at the relentless grace of God and remembering that he is able to do more than we can ask or imagine. If you need fresh encouragement, go back and re-read C. J. ’s message on 1 Corinthians 1, now in written form in the book *Continue in What You Have Learned*, published by Sovereign Grace Publishing. Or read Charles Bridges’ chapter titled “Want of Faith” in his classic book *The Christian Ministry*. Or perhaps devote yourself to a fresh study of Hebrews 11 and the fact that the Lord always uses weak vessels to accomplish his purpose. Whatever you do, keep a

8. Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 178.

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close eye on your faith and let your heart be filled with confidence in God's sovereign purpose for you and your fellow shepherds.

A healthy pastoral team is constantly cultivating their faith for the church and for each other.

ENCOURAGEMENT: STRENGTHENING EACH OTHER IN THE LORD

It was a low moment in ministry for me. Following a youth meeting I had received an outraged and highly critical email from a church member. The member went from challenging a particular leadership decision I had made in that youth meeting to questioning the goal and purpose of the youth ministry in general. His language was unguarded, even ungodly, and I found myself surprised and disappointed.

Have you had moments like that? Or perhaps you can remember a time when a fellow pastor was fighting discouragement or unfair criticism. I remember seasons when fellow pastors have struggled with the pain of seeing little harvest after years of sowing, or the crushing blow of betrayal from a former close friend.

We can often be more aware of our weaknesses than our gifts, or of our ongoing battle with sin, than our growth in godliness. Our sermon or our counsel doesn't accomplish what we hoped it would. The leader we were developing moves away. The long-term church member decides to leave and attend another church. The giving and the attendance is less than last year, and to top it off, the new church across town just added another building to their massive campus. Or, more painful than any of these challenges, our child is hardening their heart against the Lord, despite our best efforts to reach them with the gospel.

Words of Grace

In these moments, an encouraging pastoral team is priceless. Pastors are rightly determined to encourage church members, bringing

comfort and gospel strength in the midst of the ups and downs of the Christian life. What we need to remember is that the brothers who share the pastoral burden with us are Christians first, and pastors second. We all need the strength that comes from the words of grace of our fellow pastors. As Paul put it to the Ephesians, we need to form a habit of finding words to fit the occasion to give grace to those who hear (Eph. 4:29). We need to be as Jonathan to David, strengthening the souls of our brothers in the Lord (1 Sam. 23:16).

Pastoral teams sometimes focus on the need for constructive criticism, or the needs of the church, and neglect the regular pattern of mutual encouragement. Let me ask a few questions:

- When you gather for your regular pastoral meetings is encouragement a regular part of the conversation?
- After a Sunday meeting, do you encourage and thank those who preached, or led, or prayed for the church?
- Do you notice when a pastor finishes a difficult counseling meeting and seize the moment to encourage his faithfulness?
- When you gather for your annual retreat or planning meetings, does your team take time to point out the gift that each team member has been to the church, the ways that God has used each man as a ministry blessing to his people?
- When you interact personally with the other pastors, are you looking for ways to point out the evidences of God's grace and anointing in their life and ministry?

This kind of encouragement is not flattery. It should not be inane generic comments about how a fellow pastor did a "good job" with little thoughtful content. Rather, each pastor should devote himself to noticing and then celebrating the specific ways that other pastors are serving or growing in ministry.

A Joyful Discipline

Let there be no foolish pride or false modesty among pastors who claim that encouragement shouldn't be necessary. A pastor who says he does not need encouragement is a pastor who doesn't think he needs the grace that comes through encouragement—an arrogant and self-sufficient position indeed. A pastor who never gives encouragement is failing to model his ministry after Paul, who overflowed with encouragement toward his fellow workers. Paul was constantly strengthening his churches and his fellow workers with words of grace designed precisely to keep them in the race in the midst of many toils and snares. We should follow his example and do the same. Our words must build up, must press forward, must bring rest, must give motivation, must provide hope, must cause *Christ-centered courage* to flow again into our fellow pastor's heart.

Let me remind us again of Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders—keep a close watch on yourselves and on all the flock. We must be building up the shepherds who are called to build up the church. We must be pastoring the pastors with words of grace so that they can pastor with fresh grace. Pastors have to be steadfast through personal trials, giving and receiving correction, and painful seasons of ministry. The long road of faithful ministry should be paved with the regular, joyful discipline of an encouraging pastoral team. Let me encourage you to throw yourself into this practice right away. A healthy pastoral team is always an encouraging pastoral team.

HUMILITY: OIL FOR THE ENGINE OF TEAM MINISTRY

Pride is the bane of a pastoral team. We could say pride is the bane of humanity, but it's important to remember that pride doesn't shrug its shoulders and take the day off when we walk into our pastoral team meetings. To be a pastor, a man ought to have made some significant progress toward humility and away from pride in his life, but no pastor has eradicated pride, and the pursuit of humility is a crucial priority for a healthy pastoral team.

We ought to know this. And we ought to know better than to think that pride isn't lurking beneath our pastoral conversations, but sometimes we forget.

- When that feedback comes up about my last message, I sometimes forget that pride dislikes criticism.
- When the unpleasant ministry assignment comes my way, I sometimes forget that I am called to treat my brothers as more significant than myself (Phil. 2:3).
- When the team redirects budget money toward someone else's ministry burden, I sometimes forget that I am an unworthy servant, only doing my duty (Luke 17:10).
- When another pastor gets attention for their pastoral efforts and I don't, I sometimes forget that pride craves applause but humility seeks to applaud God's grace in others.

Teams that are growing in humility are like engines with fresh oil. Their gears of ministry, including their pastoral conversations, run

much more smoothly. Teams that do not intentionally cultivate humility are on the road toward engine failure. Most importantly, teams that cultivate humility toward one another are teams that reflect the Lord Jesus, and often are teams that see their example reproduced in their congregation.

Humility should be expressed regularly in our pastoral teams in a number of ways. For example, we cultivate humility when we seek out input or correction from our fellow pastors. Rather than hoping everyone loved our latest message or ministry initiative we could request their honest assessment and perspective about how we could improve. More than that, we could ask them for wisdom regarding our character, our marriage, or our family. Actually, humility also calls for confession—even of those struggles or sins that our fellow elders might not normally observe. This is the kind of humility our pride hates and it requires finding our identity in Christ and not in our reputation, but it is essential to our growth in godliness and our ultimate faithfulness as a pastor.

Humility is also expressed in deference to the team when our ideas or opinions are not adopted. In moments when people just don't see something our way, humility should come to the table and gladly count our fellow pastors, and their opinions, more important than our own. Regardless of how gifted a man is, if he frequently insists on his own way or is slow to heed the wisdom of others, if he expects deference even in small matters of gray areas, he dishonors his calling as pastor. And inviting such a man to a pastoral team is to court team disaster.

To be clear, where the doctrines of the Word are at stake, biblical humility takes an unflinching stand. Such courage is humility before the Lord and should not be labeled as pride. But it is also true that real pride in ministry often hides behind a manufactured "conviction." We must be very wary of using the word "conviction" to conceal a heart that is simply wise in its own eyes. How do we know the difference? A truly humble pastor will establish a pattern of receiving input and deferring to the wisdom of others in countless ordinary ways from

day to day and then will graciously stand firm when true Biblical principles are at stake. A proud pastor will find reasons to get his way in countless ordinary ways (or he will be disgruntled in private if he doesn't!) and will soon be known as the man who always thinks he's right. Wise pastors are noting the difference in their own hearts and in order to help those around them.

Humility should also be seen in servanthood. A pastor must not be above doing the job that nobody enjoys doing, or helping out with some mundane tasks when they are needed, or offering his time to serve and support a fellow pastor for his ministry success. Pride hates these expressions of ministry as much as it loves the applause of ministry approval, but humility is the pathway of Christ. Apart from these expressions of humility, our pastoral teams will not look like the Savior. As we pursue humility toward each other, we will look more and more like those who have walked with Jesus.

Healthy, growing, godly pastoral teams are humble—like the Chief Shepherd, who did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant, washed his disciples' feet, and died for their sins.

HONESTY: SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

I've placed this chapter here, after chapters on gratitude, faith, and humility, because those traits ought to be the foundation of our relationship on a pastoral team. Honesty without gratitude, faith, and humility can quickly become contention or perpetual criticism or a self-righteous competition.

However, a team that lacks honesty can slowly trade gratitude for flattery, faith for optimism, and humility for politeness—all of which will conceal underlying fractures and will not cause the team to grow in spiritual or pastoral maturity. We are called to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Honesty is necessary.

Hard Conversations

An honest team speaks of difficult and uncomfortable topics with each other. They are not looking only to maintain an atmosphere of calm superficiality, but to dig into areas of needed growth and improvement.

An honest team makes real observations about pastoral faults or character weaknesses. An honest team communicates when the actions or words of a team member were tempting or perceived as sinful. An honest team addresses church vulnerabilities, even if it means that some team members may need to own up to their limitations and mistakes in ministry. An honest team brings up questions about compensation, questions about team structure or role changes, questions about retirement or a reduction in a pastor's job description, questions about relational tensions between team members, questions

about challenges in a pastor's struggle with sin, and questions about challenges taking place in a pastor's health or family.

None of these topics are easy! They are *hard conversations*. None should be broached with a cavalier or arrogant attitude. All should be approached with humility, gentleness, faith, grace, and patience. But they must be initiated, and they cannot be endlessly delayed under the guise of "hoping the issue will resolve itself."

A Sign of Team Health

Pastoral teams that are not able to have real-life conversations where honest opinions are requested and received are gambling their future health. A lead pastor, in particular, should take responsibility for cultivating a habit of honesty in team conversations. And the pastor who is skilled in bringing up "the elephant in the room" shouldn't be shunned or ignored by his fellow pastors. Nor should the pastor who is willing to share the one contrary opinion when the rest of the team is in agreement. The goal of a pastoral team is not perpetual unanimity but true unity, where honest perspectives are shared and received with grace for the good of the church. Honesty is not more important than gratefulness, faith, and humility, but it should be included with them.

Lead pastors, if you want to find out if this trait is functioning well in your team, I would recommend a test. Go to each team member privately, in an unhurried conversation, and ask, "Is there anything you've been wanting to talk about with me or with the rest of the team, that you've been reluctant to bring up?" If there is nothing there, even after the pastor has been reassured that the team needs his opinion, then great! But if some important opinion has been left unstated, the team ought to have an unhurried moment where they can hear it and discuss it.

One other note: sometimes pastors who have been through a difficult church season, or a season of team conflict, can desire to avoid hard conversations in the future. A season of recovery is obviously

valuable, but fear or cynicism based on past pains should not keep us from moving back toward honest, difficult conversations in the future. And just because we are doing better than we were doesn't mean we shouldn't keep growing for the Lord's sake.

I remember hearing from a newly married couple one time that they never, ever experienced conflict. I doubted whether they were actually being honest with each other. A pastoral team that never experiences different opinions or hard conversations should wonder the same thing. Honesty is a necessary part of pastoring together. Better for pastors to endure hard conversations than for the church to suffer the consequences of unaddressed problems in the future. A healthy pastoral team is an honest pastoral team.

LOVE: DISPLAYING THE AFFECTION OF CHRIST

I conclude this section on the character of a pastoral team with that trait that Paul says binds everything together in perfect harmony (Col. 3:14). It's the trait that the Lord Jesus said would mark us as his disciples (John 13:35). It's that trait without which all of our pastoral knowledge and skillful leadership might as well be a clashing gong or a clanging cymbal (1 Cor. 13:1). It is love.

Pastoral teams must love one another. Yes, love is within and underneath and defining all of the other character traits, but the call to love means that we cannot just treat our fellow pastors with certain behaviors or act around them in a certain way. It means we hold them in our hearts, and cherish them, as beloved.

Grounded in the Gospel

I suspect that love for our fellow pastors is not always included when we assess pastoral faithfulness. I'm not sure we often think that one question of our pastoral evaluation ought to be, "Do you love your co-laborers for Christ's sake?" We know we ought to be kind to our fellow pastors, and courteous, and we might even hold ourselves to something called a "professional" standard. But the gospel standard goes beyond all of those things. The gospel standard is that we love one another.

This is true of every Christian of their brothers and sisters, and therefore it ought to be modeled by the pastors for one another. This love ought to be grounded in God's love for our fellow pastors, as revealed in the death of Christ for their sins. These brothers are those for whom Christ died. They are the beloved sons of God the

Father. Therefore, we ought to love them deeply. This love should be expressed in our words and in our actions—where we look to strengthen and care for and protect and support our fellow brothers, as the Lord has done for us. It ought to be revealed in conflict in an eagerness to forgive, in disagreement in an eagerness to be at peace, in decisions in an eagerness to serve, in perseverance in an eagerness to be longsuffering and patient.

The love of pastors for one another is revealed extensively in Paul's affection for his fellow workers. Read just these two examples again as a reminder:

So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts. (Eph. 6:21–22)

But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. (Phil. 2:22)

Professional courtesy simply doesn't rise to the Pauline standard of affection. For Paul, Timothy is a son in the faith. Tychicus is a beloved brother. Paul uses the language of family closeness, of tender affection, of heavenly love. This ought to be the atmosphere of our pastoral relationships. This ought to be the evident relationship that the church and the Lord witness between us.

My Chief Prayer for this Book

Brothers, this book includes principles and practices that I hope will serve pastoral teams. But all of those ideas will fail without love. Without love we really will be nothing more than co-managers in a church business, woefully misrepresenting the Chief Shepherd. With love we reveal ourselves to be brothers of the Beloved Son, expressing in ourselves that loving unity that Christ prayed for before his death, and that flows to us through His Spirit that he has given to us. With

love we model the aim of our charge for our people, that which we hope will be present in Christian homes and among the serving teams and in the small groups of our churches. With love we stand apart from the world, such that our unity is not based on shared preference or a shared demographic or shared gifting or shared geography but ultimately on a shared Beloved Savior.

If there is one chief prayer I have for this short book, it is that pastors would grow in Christ-reflecting love for their fellow pastors. That, more than anything else, will cause the boys in the boat to row well together.

As Daniel James Brown put it in *The Boys in the Boat*,

What mattered more than how hard a man rowed was how well everything he did in the boat harmonized with what the other fellows were doing. And a man couldn't harmonize with his crewmates unless he opened his heart to them. He had to care about his crew.⁹

The pastor has to care about his fellow pastors. He has to love them. Lord, help us to love them.

9. Brown, *The Boys in the Boat*, 235.

Summary of Section 2

The Character of Pastoring Together

These six character traits are the fruit of knowing Christ and him crucified through the power of the Holy Spirit. As we meditate on him, as we put our old flesh to death, we will increasingly exhibit his character toward our fellow pastors. The fruit of the Spirit, the character of Christ, should not be discarded as we enter the elders meeting or start our conversation with our fellow pastor, but rather exemplified. Let the shepherds of Christ look like Christ. Let Christ be seen among those who are each called to him and for him.

Section 3

The Practice of Pastoring Together

Beyond our theological principles and our character, there is the real world challenge of application. Every preacher knows this as he battles to bring the words of Scripture home to his hearers. Every counselor knows this as he seeks to connect Scripture to lived experience. And every pastor knows this as he pastors alongside other men. The chapters that follow address various categories of applied pastoral team theology. They are all derived from biblical principles and written to help our pastoral teams flourish. I pray that wisdom from these categories will help us to row well together.

FRIENDS AND PARTNERS

Are pastoral teams supposed to be colleagues or best friends? Are we co-workers or buddies? Or, if we are supposed to be both, is one more important than the other?

On any pastoral team, expectations for our relationships with other pastors can set us up for disappointment and even conflict if those expectations are not shared by our fellow pastors. If I expect a team to be primarily friends, I'll be surprised and even concerned if our team rarely or never talks about anything other than "church business." If I think of fellow pastors as colleagues, I'll be tempted by fellow pastors who constantly use up meeting time to catch up on personal issues or who are disappointed when I don't prioritize joining them for a meal.

Ministry in the New Testament

This is one of those areas where the New Testament description of ministry can guide us, but does not provide us detailed prescriptions. Studying Paul and Jesus brings us to the conclusion that ministry is not meant to be a "purely business" situation. Both spent extensive time with their co-workers, traveling together, eating together, suffering together, and ministering together. Obviously modern travel and communication makes some of their ministry realities unnecessary (I suspect Paul would take advantage of air travel and cell phones today!) yet their relational disposition should be reproduced among us.

We have seen that Paul has great affection for his co-workers. He loves being with them and is uncomfortable when they have to be separated. Paul knew Timothy's mother and grandmother,

was familiar with Timothy's stomach weakness, and knew about Onesimus's background in slavery. The Ephesian elders wept at the thought that they would not see Paul's face again. It is not difficult to imagine Paul and his band of fellow workers laughing together around a campfire on the road, telling inside jokes, and caring for each other as they faced the inevitable sicknesses and physical weaknesses brought on by their long journeys. These men were not just colleagues in the business sense of the word, conscious only of ministry work and nothing else.

On the other hand, no one worked harder than the Apostle Paul, and he commended his colleagues for their hard work as well. He labored tirelessly to be among the churches, to evangelize, to teach, and to write for their theological protection. His co-workers apparently spent their lives with similar devotion. The Lord Jesus was able to say that he always did what he saw the Father doing. So, whatever friendship fellow pastors have, their ministry together should be characterized by running in the ministry race in such a way that they will win.

Affectionate Relationship, Diligent Labor

The best counsel seems to be that fellow pastors should cultivate affectionate relationships in Christ while they labor diligently in gospel ministry. Most pastors tend in one direction or another, so all of us need to examine ourselves according to this biblical duality. If we are strong in ministry diligence and efficiency, we would do well to exert some diligence in cultivating friendships with our fellow pastors. If we are strong in relationship, we need to welcome the example of fellow pastors in working hard as unto the Lord.

In our experience in Sovereign Grace, we have found that the healthiest teams cultivate both relationship and work contexts well. Pastoral teams that invest time in relationship will find that their work conversations are smoother, and they face less miscommunication and conflict in their ongoing business. Pastoral teams that discipline their

time (in meetings and out) for efficiency and effectiveness find that they can celebrate a good harvest of pastoral fruit from their labors.

I would recommend that pastors look for times outside of their office or church building contexts on a regular basis. Perhaps have each other over to one of the pastor's homes once a month, or go out and get a meal together as a team. During one season our team got together to play disc golf (it's basically free and works for varying athleticism). And we have made a habit of prioritizing some fun times together in the evenings of our annual team retreat. We also make a practice of being consistently available to each other during the day so that we're normally up to date on our personal and family lives.

On the business side, those pastors who love relationships need to become comfortable with efficient pastoral meetings, submitting to the need to actually make church decisions and not just spend the time laughing and enjoying each other.

Sharing Honestly

It is also crucial to remember that our relational unity is not more important than honesty in team meetings and pastoral evaluations. If our desire for team friendship keeps us from honestly confessing our sins or sharing difficult observations with our fellow pastors, our love for relationship is misguided and doing disservice to the church. Precisely because these are my friends and my gospel co-workers I need to hear their honest input and they need to hear mine. Because they are my friends and gospel coworkers, we can share honestly with love and faith, believing the best of each other and loving each other in the Lord.

Pastors can and should cultivate friendship with each other while we work hard for the Lord and his sheep. Pastors that never laugh together, never eat together, and do not know the team's personal joys and sorrows are asking for conflict. Pastors that are only friends and not co-workers are missing the mandate of their calling. We are friends and partners, brothers and co-workers, fellow shepherds standing together in love and diligence watching over the sheep.

FELLOWSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

It's one of the most tragic and devastating events in the life of a church. A pastor has fallen into some serious and disqualifying sin.

In the best-case scenario, he humbly confesses his sin and willingly steps down from his role in leading the church. The church offers forgiveness and ongoing care for his spiritual reformation and the other pastors provide ongoing leadership and care for the church, and especially help for the disillusioned members who have faced the pain of hearing about their role model and teacher succumbing to serious sin. In the worst-case scenario, the pastor is unrepentant or the fellow pastors are indifferent and the witness of the gospel is maligned by a disqualified man continuing in church leadership.

Even the most healthy teams and churches may face this scenario, and probably will, given enough time. Sin is deceitful, pastors are not immune, and leadership failures will be with us until the Lord Jesus returns and makes all things new. Come soon, Lord Jesus.

Yet, while we wait for him, there is something that pastoral teams should prioritize to avoid this tragedy—the regular practice of pastoral fellowship and accountability.

This is a neglected category for pastoral teams for a number of reasons. Here are three that come to mind.

1. The Presumption of Pastoral Maturity

Pastoral teams assume that each pastor is watching over his own soul and will initiate any conversation necessary for help with personal struggles. Yet, this presumption, though common, is wildly unbiblical. Pastors are not immune to the deceptive nature of sin and the

danger of “blindspots” in our character. Apart from a regular practice of fellowship with fellow Christians, pastors are vulnerable.

Further, pastors are uniquely vulnerable to the temptation to conceal their sin because they worry that sharing their normal struggles will undermine their stature on the team or in the church. This worry is often amplified by the self-righteous condemnation and unrealistic expectations that are placed upon pastors by the secular world, the trolls of social media, and sadly, by some immature church members.

2. The Busyness of the Ministry Schedule

Pastoral teams become so focused on care for the rest of the church that they neglect or don’t prioritize mutual care and fellowship for pastors on the team. Sermons have to be written, budgets planned, counseling provided, ministries led . . . and somehow no one has checked on the spiritual health of the pastors in a long while.

At times, pastoral teams even feel guilty about using their work or meeting time to invest in mutual care, as if they are taking time that should be spent on the church. Again, this is a foolish view of pastoral ministry. All leaders need fellowship and accountability, and failing to provide it for the pastoral team will certainly harm the church.

All we need to do is talk to one of those disillusioned Christians, or worse, that former member that abandoned the faith in anger over a leadership failure, to motivate ourselves about this truth: providing fellowship and accountability for pastors *is protecting the church*.

3. A Failure to Distinguish Between Common Struggles and Disqualifying Sins

Every faithful pastor should guard the integrity of the pastoral office. This means courageously confessing disqualifying sins or charging a fellow pastor with disqualifying sin when that evidence is present. Yet not every sin is a disqualifying sin. Perfect righteousness is not the qualification for pastoral ministry. Pastors still have the flesh waging

war against the Spirit and should not deceive themselves by claiming that they have no sin (1 John 1:8). A team that measures any sin, or every sin, as on the doorstep of disqualification will eventually find that pastors are fearful to confess ordinary struggles with sin.

Each team should work hard to cultivate an atmosphere in which common sins can be confessed freely, grace can be expressed generously, and encouragement toward growth is gladly passed around. Pastors who assume that every argument with their spouse, every moment of impatience with their children, any lustful glance, any season of spiritual laziness should be immediately evaluated as cause for removal, need to reconsider the difference between scandalous or grievous patterns of sin, and our normal battle with sin.

Therefore, let's ensure that our pastors have regular fellowship and accountability. A pastoral team could accomplish this in a number of different ways. Perhaps the pastors and their wives form their own community group for fellowship and confession and encouragement. Or perhaps they join one of the fellowship groups in the church. Perhaps they do a combination of the two.

In any case, whatever the practical scenario, I would strongly recommend that fellow pastors have some context where they can check on and care for the spiritual health of their fellow pastors—even if they are engaged in fellowship with other members of the church as well. A once a month fellowship conversation as a team would be a great place to start. Ask questions about spiritual disciplines, marriage health, parenting faithfulness, and current areas of growth in godliness or succumbing to temptation. Share honestly, openly, and in light of the freedom we have from condemnation because of Christ Jesus.

Let us do all we can to help our brothers keep running the race in such a way that they will win. Please, please, let me urge you—do not neglect spiritual fellowship with fellow pastors. And let us welcome their help in watching our own life and doctrine as well.

THE PASTOR'S WIFE AND CHILDREN

Sunday, 8:07 a.m. Tina is working with little Abbie's braid and calling for Josh to keep trying to find his church shoes. Reese is still finishing his breakfast after four or five reminders from his mom to finish quickly. Tina is married to Gary, one of the pastors of the church. Gary has been gone for an hour because the church's trailer had a flat tire that morning and he needed to be there by 8:30 to lead the prayer meeting.

Working hard, Tina gets the kids out the door on time to meet Gary in their normal row in time for the call to worship. During worship Tina has to resist the temptation to worry what people are thinking when Abbie decides to lie down on the seats and complain that she's hungry. She also has to resist envy when she sees other families head off to a family lunch after church while she heads home alone with all the kids and Gary remains behind to provide encouragement and prayer to some lingering members.

God bless Tina. She'll do it all again next week, and next year, and for decades. And God bless Gary and Tina's children for following their Dad and Mom—not perfectly, but faithfully—submitting to the joys and challenges of being pastor's kids.

Healthy pastoral teams pay attention to the health of the pastor's family. This is true both because a pastor's family is his ongoing proving ground for pastoral ministry and also because the team recognizes the difference that a healthy family makes in a pastor's joy and credibility. In the ultimate sense, a pastor whose family is in complete and ongoing disarray has become disqualified from ministry. But even

if a pastor never reaches that tragic point, his ministry may suffer because his family lives with heightened tension.

How to Encourage and Guard a Pastor's Family

The wise pastoral team should look for ways to encourage and guard the health of a pastor's family. This can happen by facilitating contexts of care and encouragement for the pastor's wife—perhaps with the other pastors' wives, or perhaps in other fellowship groups in the church. Gathering the pastors and wives together on a regular basis is also a wise practice.

The team should also be mindful of informing the pastor's wives of major plans (especially regarding her husband) before they are announced to other leaders in the church. During seasons of church crisis, team conflict, or pastoral evaluation, the team should make sure that gracious, timely, and clear communication is provided to the pastors' wives so that they are not left to speculate about how the church or team is doing. It is important to note that many members in the church will talk to the pastors' wives with the assumption that they represent the pastoral team (whether that is a reasonable assumption or not!) and the team would be wise to position the wives well for those conversations.

The health of a pastor's family is also greatly aided when the pastoral team establishes reasonable compensation, work hours, and vacation policies. A pastor's child will almost certainly resent their father's job (and the church) if their dad is consistently overworked or underpaid, and if no other pastor takes an interest in the well-being of the family. Though a pastor should not idolize money or view his work as merely a career choice, the pastoral team (and deacons or financial advisory team, if they are involved) should bear in mind that it is to the church's benefit for the pastor's family to be appropriately thanked, watched over, and provided for so that his ministry can endure for decades and not end in burnout.

Pastoring Together

In short, a healthy pastoral team takes responsibility for the physical and spiritual well-being of the pastor's family. We should strengthen and support that family so that the pastor can serve the Lord well.

TEAM UNITY AND DECISIONS

Let's go back to our boys in the boat. Imagine two different problem scenarios:

Scenario #1: The rower at the front of the boat is trying to get to a different destination on the lake than the rower at the back of the boat. Because they are trying to get to different destinations, they both adjust their rowing slightly and they both end up frustrated because neither actually arrives where they wanted to go.

Scenario #2: The first two rowers in the boat want to row at ramming speed for the next five minutes (forgive the Ben-Hur reference) and then take a brief break, but rowers three and four want to row at a regular speed for the next fifteen minutes, holding off on the break. Rather than agree, they all try it their own way, their oars crack into each other, and they end up dead in the water, wondering what happened, not quite sure how to start again.

Both of these scenarios reflect a disunified pastoral team. Let's consider each one.

Scenario #1: Different Destinations

The first scenario happens when a team has some fundamental differences in doctrine or even in basic ministry goals and philosophy. But rather than address their different "destinations" they overlook the differences, and everyone pulls for a different landing zone. Depending on the patience of the team, they might go a long way together, but they will increasingly be frustrated that they can't quite seem to pull the church in the direction they think it should go.

Perhaps one pastor thinks that all five points of Calvinism should be necessary for membership but another thinks that a general affirmation of the gospel message is sufficient. Or one pastor thinks that the church should not have any ministries for specific age groups and another believes that children's and high school ministries are highly valuable. Or one pastor wants the community groups to have a major evangelistic focus and another thinks their main goal should be spiritual fellowship among Christians (and another pastor thinks they should do both at the same time.)

Rather than avoiding these fundamental differences, the team should discuss them honestly and humbly. In that "basic direction" conversation, I would recommend the following guidelines:

- Fundamental doctrines and whole-church mission goals require unanimity on a team. If the team can't agree on doctrines of first importance or on the basic mission statement of their church, they will never be unified. In this case some of the pastors should peacefully and graciously look for another "boat" where they can row with all their might. Ignoring these basic disagreements will ultimately lead to conflict on the team and division in the church.
- Secondary doctrines and individual ministry directions may be a place for "long-term deference" but only if the pastor(s) in the minority have faith to abide peacefully and joyfully with the decision. If this decision leaves them in a place of ongoing turmoil in their own heart or in team conversations, then, again, they may need to graciously and peacefully step down from the team. This is a hard outcome but much better than years of frustrating dysfunction and unresolved disunity. But don't be discouraged! An honest conversation may also reveal a miscommunication, or produce a change of perspective in some team members, or even illuminate a "middle road" ministry decision that is acceptable to the whole team.

Scenario #2: Different Rowing Speeds

The second scenario—rowing at different speeds—may not be as deeply problematic, but it can produce conflicts and unnecessary disunity all the same. Here the disunity is more a matter of accent or resources in the immediate future than it is on ministry destination.

The “fast rowers” might be pastors who believe it’s a season of growth and want to add a new ministry or attempt a more ambitious goal. Or perhaps they have a particular vision for the preaching focus in the coming year that the other pastors don’t share. The pastors have the same ultimate theological vision, they all agree on ministry philosophy, but they have a different burden on the best way to accomplish their goals in the immediate future.

In even greater measure than scenario one, humble deference and mutual respect is the key here, because these pastors could continue to work together for the foreseeable future. But humility in speech and tone will be crucial. A pastor that claims he has a “conscience” problem every time he prefers a different ministry accent or disagrees with the use of resources on the team is misusing both the word “conscience” and the patience of his team. A healthy team should have honest conversations about ministry accents and priorities, with each pastor’s wisdom weighed genuinely by the whole team. But when the team then makes a decision on an issue of accent, pace, or resources, the pastor(s) in the minority should be able to defer and support the team with humble faith and loyal representation to the congregation.

Let me add a word about generational unity and unity between experienced and new pastors on the team. Sometimes more experienced pastors waver between two unhelpful, disunifying extremes in relating to young pastors. They can either overly defer to them, under the heading of loving the next generation and seeking humility, and can fail to share their hard-earned wisdom with boldness. Or they can dismiss the young guys, assume the worst of their motives, and fail to take their ideas seriously or give them room to have real responsibility and leadership in the church.

In my experience, most younger pastors are very deferential at first, but after a certain period of time (one to three years in ministry) they can succumb to the false idea that since every elder shares an equal office, every voice should have equal functional influence on the team. In the modern era, it seems that overconfidence rather than timidity is a frequent weakness of young pastors.

Yet the role of elder does not come with an automatic download of years of experience or pastoral wisdom. Regardless of how gifted a young pastor is, he should always be eager to benefit from the wisdom of those who have been shepherding the flock long before he entered the field. Just because an older pastor might not be up to date on the latest evangelical internet storm or hasn't read the latest edition of a favorite theologian doesn't mean he lacks insight into a church's needs or that his biblical wisdom is old news. Quite the contrary.

Generational unity is one type of unity that pastoral teams should fight to preserve, as a model for the church, and for the glory of Christ Jesus through all generations.

Consistent Conversation

Here is the bottom line: teams need to talk about their doctrine, ministry philosophies, and ministry accents consistently and clearly. Where disagreements arise, they should be distinguished by their relative importance in doctrine and church impact. The more central or important the topic, the longer the team should converse before coming to a decision. In massive decisions (i.e., major changes in doctrine or adding a new pastor) a team should probably not move forward unless the team can come to unanimity. In smaller decisions, the team should reach a place of faith-filled deference (for the minority) and humble and gracious unity (for the entire team).

Where teams make this conversation a regular habit, they will enjoy greater peace and joy in rowing at the same pace toward the same destination.

TEAM MEETINGS

When I was young, my friends and I would play football at the park. Teams were picked and lined up on each side. Of course, each team really wanted to win. Winning requires working together. It requires unity. So, we had a huddle before some plays. We'd gather together in a little secretive and highly sophisticated circle and come up with our master plan for the next play. It was deep stuff. "You go long." "You go short." "You go across." "You go five steps up and come back." Good times.

If pastoral teams are going to enjoy team unity, they also need a regular huddle that is effective and efficient—the pastoral team meeting. Team meetings can hamper or help team unity and effectiveness. In some ways, the meetings of a pastoral team can be a helpful snapshot of the health of a pastoral team, and consequently, a good indicator of the future health of the church.

To make sure we're working from the same understanding, let me work briefly through a few potential questions related to pastoral team meetings.

What is a pastoral team meeting? It's a gathering of all of the pastors of the church. On a larger team, certainly there is efficiency in having smaller subsets of the pastoral team gather for a focused purpose, but if the team is truly going to operate in plurality, there must be regular times when every pastor/elder is in the same room.

What do you mean by "regular" times? Of course there isn't a biblical mandate here, so we are just operating in the category of advice and wisdom. Here is one way to look at it: A pastoral team should meet often enough for 1) the team members to contribute to

the major decisions of the church, 2) the team members to hear from each other and share about their pastoral insight into the spiritual health of the church, and 3) the team to experience healthy relational and working unity.

In my view, teams should meet no less than once a month and perhaps as often as once a week (my preference), depending on their history together, their combined pastoral experience, and the current state of the church. In times of crisis or significant change, the team may need to meet more often to achieve the three goals above.

What are signs of a team not meeting often enough? Looking at those three goals in reverse, we could say that a team is not meeting often enough when 1) major church decisions can't be made in a timely manner or team members aren't participating because of irregular team meetings, 2) pastors are carrying heavy burdens for the health of the church or a member for a lengthy time without opportunity to share them with the rest of the team, or 3) team members are frustrated by inefficiency or lack of communication or conflicts because there isn't sufficient time for team communication.

Can a team meet too often or for too long? Yes, though usually this is because the meetings themselves devolve into excessive administrative details or minor ministry decisions that should be entrusted to a particular pastor or a deacon/ministry leader in the church. Meetings can also go too long because they are not led efficiently or because there are underlying problems with disunity on the team.

Teams should work hard to discern which team member is most effective at managing a team meeting and entrust to them the task of leading the team through the agenda in an efficient and peaceful pace. Many teams will find it helpful to request agenda items and send out a meeting agenda ahead of time.

Are team meetings always formal? Pastoral teams have to give attention to the leadership of the church, their own spiritual condition, and the relational unity of the team. Usually this is accomplished best when a team has both "formal" and "informal" times together. For

example, one meeting a month might be focused on church “business and care.” Another meeting might be focused on personal updates, encouragement, and prayer. In some cases, teams are able to flow between these formal and informal modes organically; other teams may need to distinguish a unique goal for each meeting.

Teams that love hanging out but never get to business will find that they don’t make decisions in a timely manner, leading to frustration on the team or in the church. Teams that neglect informal/relational times together will find that their working unity begins to break down and conflicts or misunderstandings hamper the effectiveness of the team. Healthy teams faithfully cultivate relationships and efficiency.

Should pastors pray together in their meeting? I would certainly recommend it! Prayer can easily get bumped by other agenda items screaming for attention, but a team cannot be more effective in ministry than when they are interceding in unity before the Lord. Though of course private prayer is essential for each pastor, I would strongly encourage teams to make a regular practice of following the example of the Antioch pastoral team and spending time together in prayer. A praying pastoral team is declaring to the Lord that unless he builds the house and watches the city, their labors are in vain (Ps. 127:1)—yet by his Spirit our weakness is the occasion of his power.

Consider praying progressively through the membership directory and for upcoming church events and difficult church decisions. Pray for each other on the pastoral team, carrying personal and family burdens together. Cast your cares before the Lord, remembering that he cares for you and for his people. Call on him to display his mighty grace in your midst, converting the spiritually dead, awakening the slumbering, convicting the hard-hearted, comforting the afflicted, preserving his people for his glory. Yes, pastors, pray together.

Should pastoral meetings always be in the same place? So this question isn’t as important as the last one. But I wanted to include it because it’s not one everyone thinks about. So . . . should you always meet in the same place? No! Don’t always meet in the same place.

On occasion, get outside, or get to a restaurant, or even plan a yearly retreat away from your typical area. Grab a game of golf together (or disc golf, or bowling, or fishing or a card game or . . . whatever it is your team would find fun). Both serious conversations and relationships will benefit from the spark of a fresh context.

Team meetings can be molded according to the needs and makeup of a team. Teams with bi-vocational elders will need to meet early in the morning, late at night, or on the weekend (and the vocational guys should embrace these times joyfully!). But whatever the specifics of the team meeting, having them and crafting them for the needs of the team and the church is the crucial thing. Don't neglect them. Don't overlook them. Get those huddles together so that the gospel ministry can keep moving down the field.

TEAM CONFLICT

They were both angry. It had been building for a while . . . a little raised voice in this meeting, a sharper critique in the next. Now things had settled in a cold truce. They were kind and congenial on the surface, but underneath, and in private conversations with their wives at home, they found it hard to work together and be grateful for each other.

Pastoral team conflict is difficult. During a conflict, pastoral team meetings are tense (or nonexistent!), uncertainty about the future tempts anxiety in the present, and even slight disagreements amplify toward a major argument. We've considered how teams should guard against disunity, but what if the team is already past that point and into actual conflict? What if pastors, called to be examples of unity and love to the flock, are actually angry or bitter at each other?

Like all conflicts, pastoral team conflicts can start from the simplest disagreements and misunderstandings. They can come from different ministry philosophies that aren't resolved, or from ordinary offenses given or taken in the normal course of life together. Pastors, even qualified pastors, are still opinionated sinners. Therefore conflict, though difficult, is also a normal part of pastoring together. A healthy team needs to be able to recognize the signs of conflict and take action toward reconciliation and forgiveness.

Signs of Team Conflict

Here are a few signs that conflict may be present on your team, and then a few suggestions about how to proceed when it is:

- A pastor is less joyful and eager in ministry. There may be many other reasons for this, but decreasing joy in ministry can be the first fruit of an unsettled or even unrecognized conflict and frustration with the pastoral team.
- The pastoral team, or an individual team member, is angry or sullen in team meetings and conversation. This sign may be the most obvious, but it's worth noting so that we don't ignore it in stubborn unwillingness to call it what it is.
- The team, or a team member, is very aware of being sinned against or let down at one point or at many points by another member of the team or the rest of the team. Whether this perception is true or imagined, it lingers in the mind and perhaps forms a regular conversation at home with the pastor's wife. The perceived offense might have been the breaking of a promise, or the failure to provide expected care or appreciation, or a short and condescending demeanor in conversation, or the resistance toward an individual ministry desire. Whatever it is, it remains unaddressed and unreconciled.
- The team continually disagrees strenuously about one decision after another, but never addresses the fundamental philosophy difference that is underneath these arguments. Or the team disagrees strenuously about small decisions and can't efficiently come to unity or peace.
- A pastor withdraws relationally from the pastoral team and perhaps begins exploring other ministry options out of a hidden dissatisfaction with the current team.
- Factionalism exists on the team. One team member (or more) talks with others about their frustrations with someone else on the team—but without addressing these issues personally or in a whole team context.
- A pastor begins to discuss his frustration with the pastoral team with close friends in the church, carefully and cautiously at first, but with growing boldness.

There are probably a host of other signs, and pastors should be sensitive to their own heart for the signs of sinful conflict with their fellow pastors.

Navigating Team Conflict

If the signs of a conflict are present, what are pastors to do? They should begin with what they know to be true of themselves and their fellow pastors. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). Good news to settle our hearts in every conflict! We are called to love one another and forgive one another, as God in Christ has loved and forgiven us (Eph. 4:32). We fight and we quarrel because of desires that are within us (James 4:1), desires that are not submitted to the supremacy and authority of Jesus Christ. Our flesh wages war against the Spirit—these are opposed to each other, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:16–24).

I’ll say more about the character of the pastoral team in the final section of this book, but it is crucial to remember, in conflict, that we are called to be gospel-applying Christians toward our fellow pastors. We do not hang up our gospel calling outside the door of our elders meeting, or discard the fruit of the Spirit when we wear our pastoral team hat.

Here are a few steps that we are called to as Christians, that we should apply to conflict with our pastoral team.

Begin with prayer for your fellow pastors. Cultivate Paul’s perspective toward the Corinthians—start by noting the evidence of grace in them before considering areas of weakness or concern.

Examine your own heart first. Though not every conflict includes mutual sins, many do. The humble pastor is quick to examine his own sinful desires and judgments before looking at the speck in his brother’s eye.

Confess your sins against your brother and acknowledge where your ministry weaknesses may be a burden for him. Humility is the oil that makes the engine of team ministry run well.

Believe the best of their motives rather than assuming the worst possible ambitions.

Start the conversation about their actions or attitude with questions, rather than declarations. And start this conversation with an individual pastor, rather than the whole team, if the team is larger than two men. “You seemed upset with me yesterday, were you, or did I just imagine it?” “Would you mind explaining a bit more why you don’t think we should move forward with my ministry idea?” “I’ve noticed that we don’t seem to have informal conversation the way we used to. Have you noticed that too?” “You’ve seemed unusually quiet in our meetings recently, is there something going on that’s troubling you?”

Seek outside help sooner rather than later. Sadly, pastors often wait far too long to ask for help in disagreements or conflicts. This is likely due to pride, perhaps the foolish thought that pastors shouldn’t need help to reconcile or come to unity.

I would strongly recommend that pastors move in the opposite direction. This might be two pastors asking a third member on their team for help if they can’t seem to reconcile. Or it might be a whole team asking for help from a trusted pastoral friend from another church if they are wrestling with a ministry issue or a personal conflict. The outside person should have no agenda other than helping the pastoral team experience unity and clarity among themselves.

The main point is this: don’t wait until everyone is angry, distant, entrenched in their opinion, or talking about stepping down or moving away to finally ask for help. Ask for it early, when you first notice the conversations are growing in heat and failing to make reasonable progress, but when everyone still has lots of faith and affection for each other.

One final note: This point should be taken to heart for large and small churches alike. Large churches in particular often delay asking for help because they are normally the ones sending people to help smaller churches with advice. I've ministered in a large church, a medium size church, and a small church, and I am absolutely convinced that every team has moments when outside counsel would greatly help their internal conversations. Don't wait too long.

Don't demand perfect resolution and perfect agreement. Some differences of opinion are normal—about the past, about ministry philosophy, about what was going on in our hearts in that painful meeting. When reasonable effort and progress toward peace has been made, be willing to overlook some differences and move forward in diverse unity.

Be willing to admit when differences are too great to keep working closely together. Endless discussion about genuine disagreement is not our pastoral calling. There are moments when ongoing conversation produces clarity for the future—clarity that serving in the same mission, but in different boats, might be a more fruitful use of the gifts and burdens God has given the men at odds on the team.

An Opportunity to Honor Christ

Small conflicts (and a few large ones) will be a normal part of every pastoral team experience. Actually, if you haven't experienced *any* conflict or even small moments of sinning against each other in a long time, it may be a bad sign—the team may be growing apart, going though the motions of relationship, or concealing their real thoughts and struggles.

In conflict, as men saved by the cross of Christ, we should make it our aim to use every conflict to display the unity we've been given by the gospel. We should be ambitious to display the peace we've received in Christ. Pastoral teams will have conflict, but healthy pastoral teams will resolve those conflicts in consistent, Christ-glorifying reconciliation.

PASTORAL TEAMS IN CHURCH CRISIS

People were going to leave the church. They were angry. They were talking. And in the meantime the church finances were plunging and someone on staff was going to have to step down. It was one of the worst times in my ministry life. My fellow pastors and I rotated between feeling determined and hopeless and indignant and perplexed and exasperated. Our best pastoral efforts seemed to do little to alter the sense of chaos and uncertainty for what the next day would bring—when the phone would ring, or the next email would drop.

Have you encountered a church crisis? They are different from pastoral emergencies—those moments when you drop everything to go the hospital or meet with a couple on the verge of collapse. Those pastoral emergencies are deep burdens, but in my experience there is nothing like a church crisis.

A church crisis is when the entire church or a large section of it is deeply unsettled, or divided, or in theological danger. It's not just one member or one ministry or a small group of families. It's a fire that threatens to consume or destroy the community. In a crisis, the faith, unity, and faithfulness of the pastoral team is incredibly valuable for the perseverance of each pastor and the preservation of the church.

Counsel for the Crisis

Here are a few pieces of counsel for team ministry in church crisis that I pray will help your team.

Prepare for a crisis before a crisis. When these troubles hit, they are often abrupt, unexpected, and confusing. Sometimes it's like trying to find your way in a dust storm . . . with a broken leg . . . and someone hitting you in the face with a rake. Therefore, think of relatively calm times in ministry as a gift—a time to prepare for a crisis you can't see yet. What is crisis preparation?

- Build your team together relationally (even when it doesn't seem urgent) because the crisis will strain relationships.
- Build your church into God's Word (even when they would probably just trust you) because the crisis will pressure you to be more pragmatic than biblical.
- Deal with small conflicts or disgruntled members along the way, and do it with honesty and without false promises, because a crisis will reveal unresolved issues at the worst possible moment.
- Address the subtle ministry ambitions and fears of your heart along the way because a crisis will amplify your unmortified ministry sins.
- Most importantly, don't treat non-crisis pastoring as if it's a crisis—pressing your soul care, your marriage, your kids, and your health to the brink in the name of passionate pastoring—because the crisis will push you over the edge.

In crisis, cast your burdens on the Lord. Anxiety and the idol of control make terrible, ungodly pastors. The troubles may bring all kinds of ugly scenarios into view—the loss of old friends, the loss of reputation, the loss of church finances, the loss of ministry dreams, or even the loss of a ministry position. These burdens must be regularly, even continuously, cast upon the Lord. You, the team, and the church belong to him.

In crisis, help each other make decisions based on biblical authority and not based on practical gain. In these moments

pastors can be tempted to do anything to preserve members or to regain pastoral equity or to facilitate unity. But pastors are Bible-believing men, called to do and say what is right, entrusting the functional consequences to the Lord. We don't do "whatever works." We do what he says. In crisis, do not be more concerned about reputation or preservation than the right thing.

In crisis, do not ask for forgiveness unless you're convicted of sin; do not exaggerate church or staff weaknesses to seem humble; and do not scapegoat imperfect but qualified pastors in order to escape the crisis. All three are temptations. At the same time, do not lie or defend pastoral mistakes and sins; do not protect disqualified but popular pastors; and do not fail to confront statured but sinning members. Help each other do what is right, and trust the results to the Lord.

In crisis, reject selfish ambitions or jealous agendas. This is particularly important when the crisis is revolving around one of the pastors on the team. There may be hard decisions to be made, like standing up to ungodly slander, or making an unpopular decision, or confronting an ungodly pastor. But they cannot—must not—be driven by selfish ambition. Do not use the difficult season of crisis to "finally get something done," taking advantage of the crisis to advance yourself or your agenda in ministry. Wisdom from above is never from jealousy or selfish ambition—that is the wisdom of demons (James 3:13–18).

In crisis, love your fellow pastors more than yourself. Stand up for them with courage if they are slandered, be patient with them if they are weak or struggling, challenge them with humble love if they are sinning. Above all, keep watch over their souls—directing them to the love and sovereignty of God through regular encouragement and prayer.

Church crises, as painful as they are, are times when the promises of our Lord to preserve his church are especially precious to us. Though all may seem confusion and, for a season, our best pastoral

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efforts seem to produce no fruit, yet the Lord is on his throne and is holding his church in loving hands. Let us walk through these valleys and storms together with faith, in godliness, in love, until the Lord brings the crisis to its appointed end.

PASTORAL EVALUATION AND PROGRESS

“Mirror, mirror, on the wall . . .” So chanted the wicked queen in the classic Snow White story, wanting only to hear of her unrivaled supremacy. If we’re honest, our hearts echo a similar request for recognition and affirmation in ministry. With our good desire to serve others through ministry, we often smuggle in a craving for applause. It’s good for us to see this ambition in our own hearts, to determine to fight it, and to enlist our fellow pastors in this ongoing effort.

A Cross Mindset

The first and most important weapon we have in this effort is the cross of Christ. Sitting there beneath a fresh view of his suffering, we should remember our true unworthiness and our true glory. Seeing his wounds should mortify our ministry pride and cause us to long for a joyful lowliness of heart. As we stay before the cross, we should gladly say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty” (Luke 17:10).

This sacred spot is where all pastoral evaluation must begin, because without a cross mindset the help that we need from fellow pastors will often fall on deaf ears. Yet with a cross mindset pastoral evaluation is not a cause for fear or resistance, for hiding or suspicion, but a cause for gratefulness—gratefulness that faithful brothers want to help us be more useful to our Savior.

All of us are prone to only want to hear from others and tell ourselves that we are “the fairest of them all.” Yet, we need gracious and truthful friends who will provide Biblical encouragement and evaluation. And if our pastoral brothers get our evaluation wrong

from time to time, our identity in Christ protects us from finding our worth in our assessment from others. We don't need the applause of men to sustain us in ministry because we are satisfied with the sight of our Savior, crucified and risen.

Healthy Evaluation

So, with our feet planted firmly before our Savior and our souls resting in him, how should we invite and engage in pastoral evaluation as a pastoral team?

First, we must begin by creating an atmosphere of encouragement. We already looked at this topic, but I include it here because a team that tries to evaluate without an ongoing atmosphere of encouragement will fail. I put it that starkly on purpose. Evaluation and critique without encouragement and hope is unbiblical and will undermine the health of a pastoral team. Paul even encouraged the Corinthians before moving on to bring evaluation to their church. We should take this disposition toward our team.

Second, we should seek evaluation of ourselves more than we are eager to evaluate others. The mode here should primarily be one of welcoming input, not aggressive, forced correction. Of course, we're all proud and sometimes we need others to give us input that we didn't ask for, but our goal should be to welcome the thoughts of the other men on our team.

Third, we should distinguish between small suggestions, patterns of weakness, and major critiques. Some evaluation is just a small suggestion—and it should be presented that way. "I thought your pastoral prayer was a bit long" should not be presented or received in the same way as, "It seems to me that in recent months you've rarely addressed unbelievers in your sermons," and neither should equate to, "You consistently respond with obvious anger when someone disagrees with you." Don't bring or receive small suggestions as if they are a major problem. And don't bring major critiques as if they are no big deal.

Fourth, try to avoid surprising each other with more significant evaluations. For example, for preaching evaluation, try to build an evaluation slot into the team meeting schedule so that preachers know that it is coming. Evaluation of a pastor's overall effectiveness might best happen on a team retreat or annual evaluation meeting, rather than on the fly.

Fifth, unless disqualifying sins or egregious pastoral failures are taking place, give time for progress to be made. All pastors are called to show progress in our ministry, yet no one grows the first time they hear a critique. Most growth is slow and requires study, equipping, encouragement and input along the way. Give time for fellow pastors to show progress—and then encourage them when they do.

Struggling to Grow

Okay, someone might say, but what if progress is not being made? What if a fellow pastor has received evaluation but is still struggling to grow in that area? What if I am?

In these moments it's important to remember what we looked at regarding pastoral gifting. Nearly all pastors are going to have areas in ministry where they are qualified but weak. A great preacher may be very weak in managing his time. Or a great counselor may be very weak in preaching. In these cases, we need to distinguish between disqualifying incompetence, a stubborn unwillingness to grow, and the very, very slow progress that is normal in an area of ministry weakness. The first two are concerning and require greater steps of correction from the team, but the third must not be lumped in with them.

Where fellow pastors are weak but qualified, we must be eager to encourage every effort and every small step of growth over a period of months or years. We must not be impatient with each other. Remember, our fellow pastors have to endure our own areas of ministry weakness!

But what is the difference between weak areas of ministry and disqualifying incompetence? For this question we will always need the wisdom of God, a deep understanding of the context of the church, and awareness of the complementary gifts of the team. A qualified but weak preacher may be able to truly present God's Word, but not be very inspiring or creative or organized in his presentation. A qualified but weak counselor may be able to encourage and help Christians one on one, but he requires significant time in preparation and the counseling session is emotionally exhausting for him—he can't do too many in a short period of time.

On the other hand, a pastor who cannot accurately present God's Word despite his best efforts to study, or whose counsel rarely leaves people with greater clarity, or whose time management causes more burdens to others than his pastoring provides help—this is a person whose weakness may have crossed the line into questions of pastoral qualification.

Disagreement and Demeanor

What if a pastor is stubbornly unwilling to grow, or has shown enduring failure in some aspect of pastoral ministry? If a pastor sees no need to grow, or disagrees with the team assessment of his limitations, the team should take note of his demeanor. If he holds his position humbly, with genuine respect for the team in his disagreement, it may be wise for the team to seek outside counsel, to ensure that they are not unduly exaggerating his weakness in their evaluation.

It may also be that his limitations are uniquely burdensome to this team, but might not be as much of a burden on another team or in another context. The team should consider whether this man could be repositioned in a better place for his strengths and weaknesses. Yet there are cases when a man's limitations are such that the right course of action is for the team to gently and lovingly recommend that he step away from ministry. And may it be the case for all of us that if that moment comes, we make this process as easy as possible

for our team and as unifying as possible for our church, with our souls securely resting in Christ.

For that pastor who holds his position with an arrogant demeanor, refusing to consider the evaluation of the team—then the evaluation of his ministry weakness must give way to an evaluation of his pride. And if this evaluation is of us—we should be quick to suspect our heart if all those who love us and care for us are saying the same thing and we refuse to hear it.

Ministry evaluation is a necessary, though not easy, part of a healthy team life. With our eyes fixed on Christ we should welcome evaluation when it comes and graciously evaluate others when necessary, so that all the pastors on our team will continue to show progress for the good of the church and the glory of the Chief Shepherd.

PASTORAL DISCIPLINE AND RESTORATION

This is the chapter I don't enjoy writing and you probably won't enjoy reading. I don't like writing a chapter on pastoral discipline, knowing that my own sin could make this necessary in my life someday. I don't like writing a chapter knowing that I might have to engage in this process with a dear pastoral friend someday. *May it not be so, Lord Jesus, by your preserving grace and through the gift of the warnings of your Word and Spirit.*

Yet it is a chapter that must be included, a responsibility that we must shoulder. It is a painful responsibility, but one that is required by love for the Lord, love for erring pastors, and love for the church.

Pastors sin all the time. We do grow, by the Spirit and motivated by grace, and yet sin will always be present in every pastor until we go home to be with the Lord. Through gospel-fueled repentance our sins can gradually be mortified and our godliness can gradually grow. Yet the Bible does prepare us for the scenario of grievous pastoral unrepentance or apostasy. When this happens, we cannot delegate the confrontation or discipline that is necessary. We cannot ignore it. We cannot minimize it. To do so is to fail the Lord, our pastoral calling, our erring brother, and the church. And here, as always, Scripture is our manual for how to proceed.

Examining a Key Passage

Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. In

the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality. Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. (1 Tim. 5:19–22)

With these brief sentences in 1 Timothy 5, Paul guards the church from pastoral slander, requires a due process of justice, and calls pastors to rebuke unrepentant pastors for the protection of the church.¹⁰ Let's take each in turn.

Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses

An elder is not to be disqualified only by one person's accusation, nor on mere hearsay, lest the enemy of the church be given an unstoppable weapon to destroy any faithful man in ministry. It is worth noting that all of the biblical leaders were at the same time reproached and yet above reproach, such that we must have a category of refusing to "admit" (count against a man, proceed to a formal rebuke) charges unless they are based on evidence, and that from two or three witnesses. It is worth noting also that evidence is something that can be presented, can be witnessed; it is not the suspicion of a person's inner motives or ambitions. Therefore, the kind of pastoral failure addressed here is clear sin that can be observed and proven, but not the inner, subtle sins of the heart that all godly pastors should still be waging war against.

As for those who persist in sin

Paul assumes that a pastor is not publicly rebuked following one failure, though surely some public sins bring such disgrace on the gospel that even a single instance should produce public rebuke. Adultery

10. In Sovereign Grace churches, pastoral charges and discipline must follow the rules of discipline outlined in Part Four of the Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order.

and embezzlement are such sins. This passage has in view a process whereby a pastor sins and is presumably given the opportunity to humble himself and repent and grow in godliness, perhaps benefiting from the correction and counsel of his fellow pastors. Yet, it reminds us that pastors are not immune from the stubbornness and blindness of sin and if they persist in this sin after being given time to repent they must eventually be rebuked.

The length of time and the circumstances of evaluating pastoral repentance should surely vary given the type of sin committed, but evaluating pastors should consider the weight and clarity of the evidence against the man, his disposition toward his correction (receptive but struggling or defiant and hard-hearted), and the impact of his sin on others and the gospel reputation. Eventually, sooner or later, a pastor who has clear evidence, supported by multiple witnesses, brought against him, and who will not turn from his sin toward grace and change, must be brought to discipline.

Rebuke them in the presence of all

I take the “all” here to mean the gathered body of the church. The pastors should not be rebuked before the world, for the world has no place in judging the church. Yet the church needs to be sobered by the news that even a pastor can succumb to the deceitfulness of sin, and surely they should be called upon to appeal to this man to repent of his disqualifying sins. The assumption here is also that this rebuke would normally be accompanied by his removal from office from his fellow pastors. Though certainly many sins may not permanently disqualify a man from ministry, an unrepentant pastor charged by clear evidence and multiple witnesses should not continue shepherding the flock.

Given that pastoring calls a man to a higher standard than membership in the church, in most cases this discipline should not remove a man from membership, and the pastors should lead the church in expressing gospel affection and affirmation for the man as a

Christian brother in the body. This expression of love is important, lest loving discipline become a gathering of shame and self-righteous condemnation.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality

The severity of this charge calls every pastor to search his heart for any kind of partiality or prejudging in the evaluating of charges against a fellow pastor. The evaluation should not be slanted due to personal dislike of the man, or pressure from others, or because removing him will help the reputation of the other pastors. The pastor may not be protected from legitimate charges because of his gifting or long service to the church, or the consequences to the church if he is removed from office. Each pastor must search his heart in fear and trembling lest any partiality motivate his decision in this matter, remembering that the all-seeing heavenly court is watching his actions in this moment and is evaluating his evaluation.

It is also worth noting that Paul writes these instructions to Timothy, entrusting to qualified church leaders the evaluation of their fellow pastors. Our modern preference for “outside” objectivity—which may have value in many secular situations—is replaced here by the reminder that God himself is watching and that church leaders are responsible to handle these matters in the fear of the Lord. Holy fear, and not any fear of man, or accommodation of cultural pressure in any direction, should motivate pastors to take up this God-given responsibility whenever necessary.

Restoration and Repentance

Regarding the restoration of a disciplined pastor, I find the most encouraging biblical example to be that of Peter, who was restored by Christ himself after his cowardly denial (John 21:15–19), and later apparently benefited from Paul’s rebuke in Galatia for his fear of the

Jewish circumcision party (Gal. 2:11ff). We could also notice the case of Mark, who left Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journey, but later proved “very useful” to Paul at the end of his ministry (2 Tim. 4:11). And most importantly we would do well to remember the character of Christ himself, who does not break a bruised reed or quench a faintly burning wick (Matt. 12:20).

Certainly I would say that the more grievous the sin, the greater the damage to the church of the reputation of the gospel, the longer it should be before a man is restored to ministry. Perhaps in some cases, so many years of proven repentance and change are necessary that restoration is impossible.

However, for lesser cases, or in the case of a young pastor who is disciplined but walks in years of repentance, evaluating pastors should not hold a higher standard of ministry restoration than the Scriptures do. There should be some stories like Peter and Mark in the church—stories of men who responded to rebuke or who grew in maturity over the years.

A Sober Responsibility

For pastoral teams, this responsibility should motivate us to not be hasty in the laying on of hands (1 Tim. 5:22). Bringing a man into the office of pastor means bringing him under this potential for public discipline and the pain of disgracing the office and the church family. Let us not place a man in this role lightly, or rush any into this office.

Also, for pastoral teams, let this sober responsibility cause us to redouble our efforts at exhorting one another every day that none of us may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13). May our teams not have to rebuke each other publicly because we have been such faithful friends in private.

And yet, if this day comes, let us steadfastly help each other to be guided by the Scriptures, and especially Paul’s instruction to Timothy, so that our evaluation of our fellow pastor is absolutely biblical and not cultural, motivated by the fear of the Lord and not the fear of

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man, cleansed of any known sinful motive and done exclusively for the glory of the Lord.

ROLE TRANSITIONS

“Constant change is here to stay!” I remember hearing that quote passed on from an experienced pastor when I first entered ministry. I have certainly found it to be a trustworthy saying!

It’s not a comprehensive statement, of course. It must not be. For pastors, and pastoral teams, some things do not change: our commitment to the authority of God’s Word; our determination to preach Christ and him crucified; the biblical definition of pastoral ministry. In many ways, faithful pastoring is about *refusing to change* the things that should always stay the same. Lord, help us.

But as it relates to our specific responsibilities and the particular ministry needs of our church and our team—faithfulness requires the willingness to change. And in that regard, I have found that constant change is here to stay. Healthy pastoral teams expect these kind of changes, even initiate them, and walk through them with humility and clarity.

Here are a few healthy changes that come to mind that we should expect, and perhaps even initiate.

1. Change to a Ministry Structure, Process, or Accent

Of course, changes like this aren’t good just because they are new. But neither are they bad just because they are new. There are times when a particular ministry tradition in our church, which served our people and community significantly in the past, is no longer as fruitful as it once was. Or perhaps the team has noticed some weakness or bad fruit from a particular way of organizing one ministry in the church.

Perhaps the children's ministry needs an upgrade in its security process. Perhaps we need to transition our youth discipleship from discipleship groups to a more formal meeting, or perhaps from the formal meeting to discipleship groups. Perhaps our relational evangelism strategy could use some formal events and training, or perhaps the reverse. In these moments, pastors must not create idols of either the new or the old—and should be open to discussing changes for greater ministry effectiveness in the future.

The pastor who has led and liked the old way must not be defensive; the pastor proposing the new must not be timid or condescending (He may have to change his mind about the value of his “new and improved” ideas!). Constant change is here to stay.

2. Change of Pastor's Job Description

These changes may come about because of observations among the pastoral team, or needs that surface in the congregation. Perhaps in observing a young pastor who has been spending most of his time with the young adults and singles, the pastoral team has noticed he has a pronounced gifting as an evangelist. Many under his influence grow in their evangelism. Or perhaps a growing population of senior saints in the church introduces the need for someone to focus on hospital visitation. Perhaps the team wants to focus on marriage and parenting training but that will mean the pastor best suited to that responsibility will have to hand his children's ministry and youth oversight to someone else.

Consider even larger job description changes. A serious disagreement in ministry philosophy on the team (even a gracious one), or the need to hire a different pastor with a particular gifting, has led eventually to the conclusion that one of the pastors needs to transition off of the team. Or perhaps after many years of faithful ministry the lead pastor, or the team, or both, has begun to wonder whether another man might be more suited to lead the team. Perhaps someone else on the team has proven to have a much stronger preaching or

leadership gift, and has proven trustworthy over years of pastoring. I have a couple of friends who personally initiated their own removal from their lead pastor roles because they believed a younger man on the team was more gifted. Praise God for humble pastors in these moments.

The danger in these major transitions is pastors who cling desperately to their preferred focus or position in ministry, or who are unwilling to labor in an area where they feel less gifted, or who resent seeing another pastor do the job they would like to do. Healthy teams are joyful and humble servants, finding service to the Lord in *any* way a privilege they do not deserve.

3. Change to a Pastor's Compensation

These changes might be small but painful—as when a pastoral team has to take a pay cut because of a reduction in the church's finances. Or they might be larger, like when a pastor has to switch from full time to part time. Or, most painful of all, when the church can no longer support a full-time pastor at all and he must pursue full-time work and give up the job he loves. These are the moments when humility and faith and love are crucial. These are the moments when pride and anxiety and a mercenary disposition are poisonous.

4. Change at the End of Pastoral Ministry

Faithful Christians never retire from serving the Lord or his church, nor is it automatically the case that pastors need to retire from their pastoral role until the Lord takes them home. Yet most of us will likely experience some reduction in strength and mental capacity before our final moment comes.

In some cases, pastors may find that they can no longer carry the same ministry hours or responsibilities they once did, though they still have the desire to care for the church. These are moments for the aging pastor to be treated with honor and care for his years of service and for the team to reposition him in ways that suit his

changing abilities as the years progress. These are also moments for the older pastor to communicate support for the team and willingness to embrace a restructured job description.

In these discussions, I would encourage the team to guard against the assumption that retirement or reduction is automatic at a certain age. The health and strength of the man and the needs of the church are the issues at hand, not an arbitrary “retirement” age. And, of course, I would encourage the older pastor to use his stature to build the church consistently and publicly into the leadership of the younger pastors on the team, for the sake of the church’s future. His silence can do much harm; his support should do much good.

Constant change is here to stay. But these changes need not be moments of discouragement and division. They can be triumphs of grace as humility and faith carry the day instead of pride and anxiety. In these moments of change—pastoral teams must make sure that their greatest ambition stays the same: to no longer live for ourselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised (2 Cor. 5:15).

PASTORAL COMPENSATION

Is it really necessary to talk about pastoral compensation in a book about team ministry? Yes, it is. Can money issues really be a cause of team decline, disunity, or fracture? Yes, they can. Isn't discussion about money unspiritual and worldly? Nope. Not according to Paul. Consider the following commands.

For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not entirely speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. (1 Cor. 9:9–10)

In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. (1 Cor. 9:14)

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

One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches. (Gal. 6:6)

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 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 . . . (1 Pet. 5:1–2)

Biblical Principles

Apparently the Lord considers money to be a necessary part of our conversation about pastoral ministry. Putting these Scriptures together with the fact that Paul does sometimes not receive compensation for his ministry, we can create the following principles.

1. A church should expect to pay their pastors for their work.
2. A pastor may decline this right if he chooses.
3. Pastoral pay should be sufficient to be a pastor's "living."
4. Pastors must never be greedy, embezzling, or abuse their office as merely a means of financial gain.

These principles do not preclude unpaid pastors, but they should caution a church or team against subtly pressuring pastors to work without pay, or to work full time for less than full-time pay. It should be clearly expressed to any pastor that is invited to work without pay that he is under no obligation to do so and he is not failing to serve the church appropriately or live up to his full potential if he declines this challenging role. Bi-vocational pastors may be a great treasure to the church, and should be honored for their incredible service, but they must never be the assumed strategy of the church's future. Having unpaid pastors is possible, but not ideal, and never presumed or expected.

Now, why put these principles in a book about pastoral teams? Aren't these issues the responsibility of the deacons or some kind of financial team? This is an area where our doctrine and our practice need to align. We believe the elders are the ultimate governing authority of the church. Therefore, the pastoral team is ultimately responsible to ensure that the practice of pastoral pay in the church is in keeping with these biblical principles, and that no subtle or explicit culture or tradition about pastoral pay supersedes them in actual church practice. Certainly the use of deacons and unpaid financial teams are a very wise tool for the sake of accountability and transparency, but

the final financial responsibility rests squarely on the shoulders of the elders before the all-seeing eyes of the Lord.

The pastoral team should focus their responsibility in a few important categories. We will consider five.

1. Pastors should welcome accountability from outside the church

Paul's example is motivating here:

We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man. (1 Cor. 8:20–21)

For Sovereign Grace Churches this will mean welcoming the input and even questions about their compensation and finances from other pastors in their region or their regional leader. Some churches may also want to use a financial audit from an outside auditing service or CPA to ensure that all of their practices are legally and ethically sound.

2. Pastors should institute advice and accountability from inside the church

Pastors should consider recruiting a group of wise and trustworthy members in the church and laying out a process by which they can make recommendations regarding the pay scale of the pastors.

For our church, a group of mature members uses tools provided by Churchsalary.com and also public records providing the median income of our area to come up with an appropriate salary range for each pastor. These ranges are influenced by research into thousands of churches and are shaped by the size of our church, our annual income, our city size, and the role and education level of each pastor. These salary ranges, based on objective criteria and research, provide protection for the pastoral team from any accusation that they are either grossly underpaid or grossly overpaid. Our pastoral team then

chooses salary points within the approved ranges based on factors like varying job descriptions from year to year, job performance, cost of living increases, etc.

Of course, many healthy churches have their own particular compensation process. Whatever our practice is, it should demonstrate our financial integrity and accountability as a way to protect the reputation of the gospel and the gospel ministry.

3. Pastors should guard their hearts and their team from any kind of greed

An objectively created salary range is a protection here, as are practices that make sure pastors do not have hidden access to any church funds. A pastoral team should also be vigilant against private inurement, using church resources or property for their personal financial benefit.

4. Pastors and pastoral teams should make a plan for a pastor's declining years

Though Christians do not “retire” in the sense of ceasing to work with all their strength for the Lord, the day may come when the pastor is no longer able to bear the weight of full-time or even part-time pastoral ministry. Whether a team chooses to have a distinctive “retirement package” as part of their compensation or simply to encourage and challenge each other to set aside part of their normal compensation for those declining years, I would strongly recommend that future plans are made and understood by each pastor. Procrastination on this point can lead to a painful burden for both the pastor and the church in the future. Taking small and reasonable financial steps along the way is the way to go.

5. Pastors should make their compensation a part of their eldership discussions

Sometimes pastors can be embarrassed by this topic. Sometimes pastors and members can assume that since we should not love money,

discussing money at all is unspiritual. Occasionally, pastors can labor under financial hardship for years before anyone on the pastoral team or church looks into an objective study regarding reasonable salary. At times, resentment can take place on a team if one pastor is paid more without any clear reason, or if a pastor's pay is not increased along with greater responsibilities or work hours. There is no need for this kind of unbiblical culture and financial hardship or division to develop in a church. Straightforward conversations about biblical principles and wise practices can keep this topic from endangering an otherwise healthy team.

SOWING FELLOW PASTORS INTO THE MISSION

“How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.”

(A. A. Milne)

It was my last message as a pastor of our church, and this quote seemed to fit the occasion. Of course, luck has nothing to do with it. The gift of pastoral fellowship, of church fellowship, is a gift. It comes from the Lord himself, given to us because he loves us.

I was leaving to plant a church, after eight years of pastoring among friends and dear church members. We had been through good times and hard times together, and though church planting is exciting, saying goodbye to loved ones is always sad. Nearly a year before, our pastoral team had first announced this plan to plant a church, to send me and a sacrificial and eager church plant team a thousand miles away. At that meeting, one of my friends, a leader in the church, had asked a genuine question of our senior pastor. We were only a few years removed from our last church plant, and he was trying to get used to the idea of sending another pastor out again.

“Are we just going to keep doing this? Just keep sending leaders out?” he asked. It was an important moment. A church defining moment. A gospel mission moment.

“Yes.” Our lead pastor replied simply, compassionately, but clearly. Yes.

A year later I was standing in front of the church, quoting A. A. Milne, and sharing with the church that I loved a few final parting words of encouragement.

Called to Sow

We are going to keep doing this. It is one of the hardest and most rewarding parts of pastoral team ministry. We are called to sow. One pastor, who has been laboring locally for years, might begin to receive a call and burden similar to Paul and Barnabas in Antioch. Or perhaps it might start with the team gaining a greater burden for a particular city or neighborhood and approaching one of their own with the request to pray about starting a new work. Or sometimes a church out there is in desperate need of a pastor, and we need to prayerfully consider releasing one of our own, one we would rather keep.

A godly pastoral team is a sweet thing, a delightful thing, a golden sliver of time. I love the joys of the boys in the boat. But it is not the main thing. It is not the main thing in our hearts—which is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not the main thing for our churches—which is the loving sovereignty of the Chief Shepherd preserving us through His Word. And it is not the main thing of our mission—which is that churches must be planted and strengthened by faithful pastors—which requires the sending of faithful pastors from healthy pastoral teams.

To put it another way, our current pastoral team is something that we must not grasp; we must hold each member up to the Lord, ready to sow what God has given into His mission, for the sake of the harvest.

The Joyful Sacrifice of Sending

The Jerusalem church sent Barnabas, the Antioch church sent Paul and Barnabas, Paul sent Timothy and Titus at various times to serve the mission, and this same principle is at work in the stories of Epaphroditus, and Luke, and Mark, and Silas, and Aquilla and Pricilla, and Onesimus, and many others. Gospel work is sending work, sowing work, if we would be living New Testament Christianity. The church that never gives and sends sacrificially outside of itself is being unfaithful, and is missing out on the calling of our Christ-like mission.

Practically, this means not ignoring or pressuring those with an urge toward church planting to stay where they are. It means celebrating a qualified church planting pastor and supporting him publicly and personally so that he has every opportunity to be sown in strength and joy. It means never holding a particular team makeup as sacred. It means we should all be ready, at any age and season, to embrace the hard goodbyes that will always be a part of our joyful mission.

Of course this does not mean that every pastor is called to go, or that pastors can't ever serve together for decades. Some will, and may they be blessed with unity and fruit. But some *are* called to go, and their friends are called to send.

Sowing pastors is hard, but glorious. It is *happysad* as we say in my church. But *happysad* is the way of the Lord Jesus, who for the joy set before him endured the cross (Heb. 12:2). And for the joy of the harvest we send and we go, laying even dear pastoral team members in the hands of the Lord, for the sake of his glory.

Conclusion

PASTORING FOR THE CHIEF SHEPHERD

We've come to the end of this brief study. There is one more thing to say. It is the goal to which all the rest of the book points and all of our principles and our application and our character ought to be aimed: We pastor together for the Chief Shepherd.

As Jonathan Edwards said, this is "The end for which God created the world."¹¹ And it is certainly the end for which he called us as pastors. We pastor together for the One who laid down his life for us and for the church for whom he shed his blood.

This is the motive. This is the why we pastor together the way we do, the way we should. This is the ultimate regulating principle for pastoral team ministry. It is the Lamb, once slain, now standing, and waiting to call us home.

We honor the biblical principles of pastoral ministry because we gladly bow our pastoral practice to his authority and we trust his greater wisdom. We love our fellow pastors for his sake and for the sake of their fruitful ministry among his flock. We watch over our pastoral character because we want to reflect the Shepherd as we labor under his watchful gaze.

Pastoral ministry is hard work, and pastoring together in a fallen world carries many temptations and sorrows. Yet we have our eyes set on the prize. Before us there is a day when the master will call his servants to himself. And in addition to all of our care for his sheep,

11. Jonathan Edwards, "A Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World," published in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 1* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974).

we will be called to account for how we worked with the fellow shepherds he gave to us. That is the moment we live for.

Countless moments of impatience and selfish ambition and pride toward our fellow pastors will be covered, as will all our other pastoral failures, by his blood. No pastor will enter that moment with a perfect pastoral record. But the Great High Priest has already accounted for our many blemishes when he laid down his blameless life for his sheep and their shepherds. My pastoral and pastoral team failures were counted against him and paid for completely. Thank you, Lord Jesus.

And amazingly, he has noted with joy all of our pastoral efforts, fueled by his grace, as trophies for his glory. Each imperfect, faithful pastor will hear his words, “Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter into the joy of your master” (Matt. 25:23).

My prayer for myself and my fellow pastors is that on that day we would hold up to the Lord a lifetime of loving our fellow pastors. My prayer is that we will be able to enjoy many heavenly reflections of pastoring well together as a triumph of his grace. My prayer is that we would know something of what Daniel James Brown describes in *The Boys in the Boat*: “A singular thing that had unfolded in a golden sliver of time long gone, when . . . good-hearted young men strove together, pulled together as one, gave everything they had for one another, bound together forever by . . . respect and love”¹²— all for the sake of Christ.

Let us pastor together now in such a way that we can cherish reflections of pastoring together then, when we are in his presence.

To the Shepherd of the sheep, who is also the Shepherd of the shepherds, be glory. From him and to him and for him are all things, now, and forever. Amen.

12. Brown, *The Boys in the Boat*, 2.



We plant and strengthen
CHURCHES
for the glory of God.

Sovereign Grace Churches is a confessional community of congregations, united in theology, fellowship, and mission. We treasure the sovereign grace of God in Christ, and we are committed to gospel-centered doctrine, preaching, and living.

Our fellowship extends beyond mere denominational affiliation, to relationships that foster mutual encouragement, care, and a glad pursuit of Christlikeness.

We are continuationist in our pursuit of the Spirit and spiritual gifts, complementarian in convictions on gender, and elder-governed in our polity, with some carefully delineated areas of shared governance. Our passion is to see churches planted and nurtured throughout the world.

To learn more about our churches, including our Statement of Faith and how to join us, visit sovereigngrace.com.



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The Sovereign Grace Pastors College exists to train men for pastoral ministry. We are a confessional institution, founded upon the beliefs and values of Sovereign Grace Churches. Our 10-month program combines careful scholarship, intentional discipleship, and practical training, all in the context of a specific local church.

At the Pastors College, students learn how to build their lives, families, and churches upon the gospel of Jesus Christ. This gospel produces a particular kind of pastor—joyful, grateful, servant-hearted shepherds who faithfully lead and care for “the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

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