

KEEP WATCH OVER

YOURSELVES AND ALL THE

FLOCK OF WHICH THE HOLY

SPIRIT HAS MADE YOU

OVERSEERS BE SHEPHERDS

OF THE CHURCH OF GOD,

WHICH HE BOUGHT WITH HIS

OWN BLOOD.

The Pastor



BY JOSH HANSON

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Introduction

I remember the day. It was early January 2023, and I was meeting with some pastors in Orlando when our Executive Director sent me an article that included a list of stressors pastors experience. She asked, "Which stressors on this list would you say you relate to the most? And is there anything else you would add?" She had copied one of our elders on her email, so I couldn't ignore her. I spent a couple of days reflecting on her questions before I sent my reply.

I wrote, "I don't know that I'm good at being the 'vision guy' for Gateway Church. Things like 'Should we start another campus?' or 'Should we think about starting Saturday night services again?' are questions I never know what to do with, when to bring up, or how we'd even know if we have answers. I've never understood how pastors develop a 3-5 year vision plan. It all seems like throwing spaghetti against the wall to me."

This email thread sent me and the elders on a ten-month journey. After many conversations, meetings, prayer, and reflection, a vision began to take shape. I wrote down some ideas, discussed them with the elders, presented them to the staff and some volunteers, and eventually did an entire preaching series on this new vision.

This graphic depicts what had become clear to me:



These four columns represent the key components that drive a local church's life, ministry, and direction. The first component is the pastor. The second component of a church is its key leaders. The third component of a church is its discipleship process. And the fourth component is the disciple, all of us who are followers of Jesus here at Gateway Church.

So, component one: the pastor. That's me, Pastor Josh, for better or worse. The Bible has much to say about a pastor's qualifications, characteristics, and calling; we'll look at those together throughout this booklet.

The second column, or the next component of a church, is the other key leaders. Here at Gateway Church, our key leaders include our elders, our deacons, our staff,

and those who serve as Life Group leaders. To learn more about our leadership model, check out the second booklet in this series, *Church Leadership*.

These key leaders help the pastor move the church along in a specific direction, leading to the church's third component: our discipleship process. At Gateway Church, this is our discipleship process: Worship, Connect, Serve, and Go. It's how we help you grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ. To learn more about our discipleship process, pick up a copy of the third booklet in this series, *How Do I Grow?*

Finally, the fourth component of the church is the disciples who make up the church. Our discipleship process—what we **do** to grow in our faith—is vitally important, but that doing must always lead us toward who we are to **become** as disciples of Jesus Christ. Becoming a disciple of Jesus is the goal, and everything else—our discipleship process, key leaders, and pastor—leads us toward this goal.

Our vision for every follower of Jesus here at Gateway Church is that we'd be disciples:

1. Who are Word and Spirit Christians.
2. Who are generous.
3. Who are family.
4. Who are disciples who make disciples.
5. And who are Kingdom-minded.

The fourth booklet in this series, *Disciples of Jesus*, details each characteristic of a disciple. Together, these four

booklets will help you better understand our vision for the kind of church we are striving to be here at Gateway Church.

Component 1: The Pastor

So, let's begin with the first component of a local church: the pastor.

Our goal is always to see what the Bible says about a topic, which is what this booklet is about. We will begin with the Bible and return to it repeatedly as we look at the qualifications and responsibilities of the pastor. There is just one important question to consider before we go any further:

Who is responsible for doing ministry at Gateway Church?

At first glance, this may seem like an easy question: it's the senior pastor, right? Or is it the staff? Maybe it's the elders or deacons? Throughout this booklet series, we'll see that ministry isn't simply the work of the senior pastor, nor is it just the responsibility of the staff, elders, or deacons. We'll see ministry is the responsibility of *all* who profess faith in Jesus Christ. Being a Christian means being in ministry. However, certain responsibilities are unique to those called to be pastors, so we'll turn our attention to those now.

Chapter 1

Begin With the Bible

In *The Sound of Music*, Julie Andrews teaches the Von Trapp children to sing by saying, "Let's start at the very beginning / A very good place to start / When you read you begin with A-B-C / When you sing you begin with Do-Re-Mi." Likewise, the Bible is the best place to understand the pastor's role better, so that's where we will begin.

Four Passages

Many biblical passages speak to the role of the pastor, but four common passages must be looked at to understand this topic. They are: 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, Ephesians 4:11-16, and 1 Peter 5:1-5. Let's look at each of these in more detail.

1 Timothy 3

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.

Here, we find the qualifications and characteristics required of elders, which is another term used interchangeably with the word pastor in the Bible. There's much more here than a short booklet can cover, but a few things are worth noting.

First, being a pastor begins with a call from God, which Paul speaks to when he says, "if anyone aspires." Thus, we should be cautious in thinking that being a pastor begins with a nominating process. It starts with an internal call by God on an individual to serve in pastoral leadership.

Second, besides the requirement for elders/pastors to "be able to teach," the other characteristics are unremarkable. They're qualities we should hope to see in any follower of Jesus. Thus, the two qualities that stick out from the rest are the internal call to serve and the ability to teach.

Third, although being the "husband of one wife" is mentioned, this does not exclude singles from serving in pastoral leadership. It simply means if you are married, you are faithful to your spouse.

Finally, a quick note about "being able to teach." This qualification doesn't necessarily mean every elder/pastor preaches regularly. Paul later says in the same letter to Timothy, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, *especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.*"

So, all elders/pastors are to be able to teach, but only some elders "labor in preaching and teaching." The distinction is some elders/pastors are paid to preach and teach the Bible. They've most likely had more education in preaching and teaching, and their primary role is that of preacher and teacher of the church, which is the topic of this booklet. However, all elders are to be able to explain what the Bible means to others in a way that is faithful to Scripture. In this way, opportunities to teach include:

- Leading a small group.
- Counseling a couple or individual.
- Leading a Bible study.
- Teaching children in the church.

Titus 1:

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you — if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not

be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

In this letter from Paul to another pastor leading a church, there isn't anything new that's not already contained in his letter to Timothy. There is a bit more clarity, though, on the expectation that elders/pastors be able to teach. The teaching includes "giving instruction in sound doctrine" and also being able "to rebuke those who contradict it." This teaching means all elders/pastors should know fundamental, sound theology and be able to recognize contradictions to that sound theology.

Ephesians 4:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into

him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Here we have another letter written by Paul. This time, he's writing to the church in Ephesus, which Timothy is pastoring in when he receives his letter from Paul. Here, he gives an insight into what elders/pastors do.

First, elders/pastors equip the saints for the work of ministry. It can be easy to view pastors (and church staff) as the people paid to do the ministry of the church. "Not so," says Paul. He says a pastor's role is to train and equip the congregation to do the work of ministry. The pastor's work is done primarily through preaching but is also accomplished through other teaching opportunities.

Second, "equipping of the saints" includes leading the congregation towards "unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God." This includes teaching about doctrine – the truths we believe.

Third, this "equipping of the saints" through preaching and teaching continues until the congregation reaches the "stature of the fullness of Christ." Paul then describes what this looks like in verses 14-16. It's Paul's way of saying the goal in preaching and teaching is for the congregation to continue growing until they reflect Christ perfectly, which will not happen in this life. So, pastors are to

keep preaching and teaching until Jesus returns. We'll look at preaching in more detail in the next chapter.

1 Peter 5:

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."

Finally, someone other than Paul gets to chime in on our discussion! First, notice that though we tend to speak of Peter as an apostle and disciple, in this passage, he refers to himself as a "fellow elder." So, Peter viewed himself as a pastor as well. I bet this idea comes from his conversation with Jesus, where Jesus tells Peter to *"Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep."* - John 21:15 (ESV)

Thus, Peter's words to other pastors begin with, "shepherd the flock of God that is among you." For that is what a pastor does: He cares for God's sheep. Peter tells

pastors how to shepherd. Shepherds are to be gentle "and" are to be willing. They're not to be volunteering for pastoral leadership out of selfish gain.

Peter also reminds his fellow elders/pastors of the reward that is theirs for being faithful shepherds. Though Paul tells us it's proper for a pastor to be paid for their work, Peter reminds pastors their ultimate reward isn't earthly but is heavenly – "a crown of unfading glory." Some have used this to justify under-paying their pastors and church staff, which is a shame, as no Christian, not just church staff, is to set their eyes on worldly rewards. All followers of Jesus are to be "storing up a treasure in Heaven," not here on earth.

Finally, Peter gives counsel to people in the congregation. He tells them to "be subject to the elders" and to be humble. Similarly, the author of Hebrews writes, *"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith."* - Hebrews 13:7 (ESV) The author of Hebrews also later states, *"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."* - Hebrews 13:17 (ESV)

Final Thoughts

Being a pastor begins with being called by God—an inward call accompanied by an outward confirmation by others. No one has the right or authority to declare themselves a pastor. Finally, as Christians, the Bible is our

final authority on all subjects, especially pastoral leadership. Now that we've seen some of what the Bible says about pastors, let's look more closely at two of the pastor's key responsibilities: preaching and prayer.

Chapter 2

On Preaching

What makes a sermon a good, ordinary, "what should be expected" sermon? Even if you've never thought about asking this question, you answer it every time you listen to a sermon because it's impossible to listen to a sermon without evaluating it.

So, what makes a sermon a good one to you?

For you, it's the length of a sermon. A long sermon is a bad one, and a short sermon is a good one. In fact, the shorter, the better!

It may be how the sermon makes you feel. If the sermon leaves you with positive vibes, it's a good one. If the sermon leaves you feeling convicted or like you need to change, it's a bad one.

Maybe it's not how the sermon makes *you* feel but how you think the sermon would make your unbelieving friend or family member feel. You think, "Man, if my roommate had shown up today and heard this sermon, they'd never go to church again." That equals a bad sermon. Or "Man, I wish my son or daughter had shown up today; they would've loved the sermon." That equals a good one.

Some enjoy topical sermons. Preach a sermon on "how to be financially prepared for retirement," "how to

improve my marriage," or "how to raise my children to be upstanding citizens," and we've got a good sermon on our hands.

Others want in-depth sermons. Please give me the Greek and Hebrew. Go deep theologically. Teach me something I don't know.

What about you? What makes a sermon a good one?

Here's a different question, which, I believe, is a better question.

What does God say makes a good sermon? And does your definition of good, ordinary preaching agree with God's definition?

In this chapter, we'll see what makes a good sermon according to God. We'll look at what might be considered a very ordinary sermon. We'll allow this ordinary sermon to help us better understand what we should expect in every sermon so when we evaluate whether a sermon is good or not, we're doing so in agreement with God's definition of what makes a good sermon.

But First, Some Context

You probably know Jesus was crucified on the cross and that death could not keep him in the grave. For forty days after his death, Jesus appeared to his disciples, teaching and preparing them for the mission he would give them. And on the day of his ascension —the day he went up to Heaven— Jesus gave his followers their mission. Jesus, *“ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John*

baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” - Acts 1:4b-5 (ESV)

And then he said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” Acts 1:8-9 (ESV)

And with his last words, Jesus gave his disciples – all one hundred and twenty of them – their mission. And he promised that they'd be given the power needed to accomplish this mission.

The disciples are in Jerusalem. The promise of the Holy Spirit has come upon them. They now have the power they need to accomplish their mission.

And there's a crowd of people who have seen something happen to the disciples, but they're confused by it all. So, to explain everything, Peter stands up and gives his first sermon. Peter's sermon will help us understand what makes a sermon a good one.

Sermons Are Biblically Based

Peter's sermon connects the crowd's experience to the Bible. In preaching to the crowd, Peter shows them how what they have just experienced is directly connected to the Bible. Here's how Peter's sermon begins:

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who

dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: " 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.' - Acts 2:14-21 (ESV)

In response to the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples, some in the crowd assumed that the best explanation for this current event was that the disciples were all drunk as skunks. To help clear up their confusion, Peter connects the crowd's experience to the Bible. *"We're not drunk," he says. "This is what the Bible said would happen."* All good sermons should do this. For a sermon to be a good one, it must show you how the Bible and life intersect. It may not be the topic you were hoping to hear about, and it may not even appear to intersect with your life at that exact

moment. Maybe it will remind you of an experience from your past, or something you don't know is in your future, but, in some way, a good sermon should intersect God's Word with life.

There's much debate about which should come first when preparing a sermon. Should life experience come first or a Bible passage? Here at Gateway Church, we lean towards the Bible passage coming first and then the experiences of life.

You may ask why. If I, the primary preacher, allow life experiences to drive the sermons I preach each week and then find a verse or two to fit that particular life experience, I'm not sure I'm brave enough to tackle some life experiences that God's Word addresses.

What do I mean? If topics drive my sermons, I could easily cave towards non-controversial topics. Topics you *want* to hear preached, not topics you *need* to hear preached. What topics would I avoid? Topics like adultery. Or God's view of divorce. Or racism. Or materialism. Or what makes a sermon good. That's a great example if you think about it.

If you showed up to church only to hear a sermon on the question of "what makes a good sermon," what would go through your mind?

You might ask yourself, "I wonder if Josh has gotten some complaints about his preaching, so he's defending himself today?"

Or "Does Josh realize what's happening in the world? Or in my world? A sermon on what makes a sermon good?"

Come on, this is so impractical! I'm sure glad my unbelieving friend didn't show up today."

Compare those thoughts with, "Why is Josh preaching Acts 2:14-41 today?"

"Well, he preached Acts 2:1-13 last week, and these are the next verses in the chapter. And next week, he'll be preaching Acts 2:42-47. Why? Because they're the next verses in the chapter."

So why is Josh preaching about what makes a sermon good?

"Because this passage is an example of a good sermon preached by the apostle Peter. And Josh is allowing Peter's sermon to teach me what makes for good, ordinary preaching so I know how to evaluate his sermons, and all sermons for that matter, according to God's standard."

And suddenly, a sermon that seems impractical is very practical. Besides, as I said earlier, all of you evaluate every sermon you hear anyway. And if you're going to listen to a sermon, why wouldn't you want to know what makes a sermon a good one in the first place?

Let me pause and say something that will sound like I'm contradicting myself.

If there's a national or world crisis the elders and I deem significant enough to be addressed immediately from the pulpit, we will allow life experience to drive the sermon that week.

The same is true for Christian holidays like Easter and Christmas. Sometimes, the book of the Bible we're going through will work for these special weekends; other times, it

won't. So we have to evaluate carefully and be ready to adjust for these special occasions.

Whether we're going through a book of the Bible or taking a break to look at a specific topic, a good, ordinary sermon shows us where the *Bible* and *life* intersect. This intersection may seem practical, like "how to be a more honest person," or the intersection may seem very impractical, like a sermon on your identity in Christ. But once you begin to look for it, you'll see how both examples intersect the *Bible* to *life*.

Sermons Are Christ-Centered

Peter's sermon interprets and explains Scripture in light of Christ. Look carefully at Peter's sermon; you'll notice he takes different passages from our Old Testament and interprets and explains them with Christ in view. Let me show you what I mean.

Acts 2:22-36 (ESV)

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know — this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him, "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand

that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.' "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Peter is preaching from the Old Testament. He refers to the prophet Joel and two different psalms. But, in preaching from these Old Testament passages, he shows his

listeners how Jesus is the point of the texts he's referencing. Running through the Bible is a single theme, one thread of hope, and his name is Jesus.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible has one hero: Jesus. One Savior. One Warrior. One Sacrificial Lamb. One Redeemer. One True Israel. On and on I could go. My point is no matter where you are in the Bible, Jesus is the point of what you're reading.

England's Prince of Preachers, Charles Spurgeon, once said, "Preach Jesus Christ, brethren, always and everywhere; and every time you preach be sure to have much of Jesus Christ in the sermon. You remember the story of the old minister who heard a sermon by a young man, and when [the old minister] was asked by the [young] preacher what he thought of [his sermon] — he was rather slow to answer, but at last he said, 'If I must tell you, I did not like it at all; there was no Christ in your sermon.' 'No,' answered the young man, 'because I did not see that Christ was in the text.' 'Oh!' said the old minister, 'but do you not know that from every little town and village and tiny hamlet in England there is a road leading to London? Whenever I get hold of a text, I say to myself, "There is a road from here to Jesus Christ, and I mean to keep on his track till I get to him.'" 'Well,' said the young man, 'but suppose you are preaching from a text that says nothing about Christ?' 'Then I will go over hedge and ditch but I will get at him.'"

Jesus is the point of every passage of Scripture. He's the point of everything!

This fact may sound strange to our ears today, but Christians centuries ago used to say things such as:

The preacher explains the text; if he says what is true, it is Christ speaking.

We both, pastor and listener, are only pupils; there is only this difference, that God is speaking to you through me. That is the glorious power of the divine Word, through which God himself deals with us and speaks to us, and in which we hear God himself.

When thou hearest the minister preaching the truth, thou hearest not him, but the Son of God, the teacher of all truth, Christ Jesus.

So, as you evaluate whether a sermon is good, ask yourself, "Was Christ preached?" Because an ordinary sermon links the *passage* being preached to *Christ*.

It doesn't matter if we're in the Old or New Testament. Whether we're looking at the life of Abraham or David or deciphering the prophetic visions found in the book of Revelation, all Scripture —the entire Bible— is to be interpreted and explained with Christ in view. Because when Christ is preached, you're hearing from Christ himself.

And something happens in a sermon when the pastor leads you to Jesus from the preached passage. You begin to worship Jesus right then and there. You start to be changed because your eyes are fixed on Jesus, your Savior. And the One who began a good work in you has promised to see it to its completion.

Occasionally, I'll search for the words "Jesus" and "Christ" in my sermon manuscript to see how many

instances there are (the count is ninety-two for this booklet), not counting any "he" and "him" that refer to Jesus. I do this as a way for me to evaluate whether or not I've helped to move us from our text, whatever text it may be, to Jesus. I want to ensure I've taken us down the road to Jesus, even if we had to "jump over some bushes and climb out of some ditches" to get to him from our text.

Sermons Require a Response

There is one final detail in Peter's sermon worth noting. He calls the people to action. Peter calls the crowd to respond to what they have heard in his sermon.

Acts 2:37-41 (ESV)

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Having connected the Bible to life and demonstrated how Jesus is the fulfillment of the texts he has preached from, Peter then calls the people to respond. He calls them to respond to what they've heard from God's Word and, more specifically, calls the crowd to respond to Jesus.

Peter tells the crowd to repent and, by implication, to believe in Jesus and get baptized. And though each sermon may call you to a specific response, one response that's always appropriate is the response of repentance and belief. The next time you're listening to a sermon, ask yourself, *Where am I not believing or obeying the truth I'm hearing preached?* That's an opportunity for repentance and belief.

To Recap

We've been looking at what makes a sermon good. Some of you started this booklet with a hundred other topics you thought were more interesting. But I hope you've seen how this may be one of the most essential topics you ever read about because as you evaluate the sermons you hear, which you can't help but do, you can now evaluate them according to God's Word.

Did the sermon connect the Bible to life? Was Jesus preached? And was there a call to action?

Good preaching is pretty ordinary. It may not be what you expect it to be, but ordinary preaching is one of the key ways God uses pastors to help his people grow in their faith.

Chapter 3

On Prayer

Do you remember the show *Dirty Jobs*? The show's host, Mike Rowe, would travel around and perform the most difficult, strange, disgusting, and messy jobs the producers could find for him to do, guided by the people who usually do these dirty jobs. The show exposed us to and helped us appreciate the people who do these necessary and challenging jobs.

It wouldn't be as popular now, but a similar show about the local church would be interesting, given the jobs, roles, and tasks someone must do. The Bible describes the people of the church in many different ways.

We're called a family, with each individual Christian being a family member.

We're called a temple where each person is like a brick of the building.

We're called a body, and each person is described as a part of the body—a hand, a foot, an arm, etc.

Now, one of the points of these different descriptions of the church is to teach us that not all Christians are the same. We should believe the same things about the Bible, God, and what Jesus accomplished in his life, death, and

resurrection. However, who God has created each of us to be and do is unique.

One tactic of our enemy, one way he likes to try and cause division in the church, is to get us to not appreciate the unique contribution each of us brings to the church. The enemy will tempt us to judge one another according to the gifts and talents God has given us and the unique way he has called us to serve the church. All while ignoring that God has given others a completely different set of gifts and called them to serve the church differently.

And what I appreciate about the early church, as we read about in the book of Acts, is how it resisted this tactic of the enemy. The early Christians faced a problem that could have easily caused division. Yet, the church finds a solution that creates unity.

The Church Has a Problem

Here is what they were facing in Acts chapter six.

Acts 6:1 (ESV)

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

Now, there's an obvious and a not-so-obvious problem here. The obvious problem is that some widows are being neglected in the daily distribution of food and goods. This was a practice unique to the Christians. The practice

was based on their belief that everything is a gift from God and should be used for his glory and the good of others. So, this daily distribution is an incredible picture of the gospel's life-changing, priority-shifting, and value-influencing power.

However, in Acts, the church is still figuring itself out. It's not very organized, which explains the not-so-obvious reason why some widows were neglected.

What's the not-so-obvious reason? Some think there was some prejudice between the Hebrews and the Hellenists, but I'm not so sure that was the case. Until this point in Acts, the author, Luke, has emphasized the unity among the Christians. For example, he has described them as being of "one heart and soul." So there's unity among them in spite of their ethnic differences—a unity because of their shared faith in Jesus.

So what is a more likely reason for the problem? How about the explosive growth and size of the church? The church started off big, to begin with. It had 2,000 members in Acts 2, and it only grew bigger. The last number Luke mentioned was 5,000 men who believed, so it's a big group of people.

And do you know what happens when you are part of a big church?

For starters, it's more difficult to know everyone. Can you relate?

Cliques can form based on shared interests, where your kids go to school, where you work, or even which campus you attend.

It becomes easier to misinterpret the motives of others, there's constant change because of growth; you might not have access to things you're used to, like your favorite spot to sit or that worship service time that worked best for your family or even access to the senior pastor because he's broadcast to you from a different location.

Things get more organized and formalized as a church gets bigger, which can be a pain. Like having to make a reservation way ahead of time in order to use our facilities or you pop in to meet with a staff member only to find out they are already meeting with someone and have another appointment after that and another one after that.

There are many benefits and blessings when you're part of a large church. Still, we must be careful not to allow the challenges of being part of a large church to cause division among us.

What does any of this have to do with the pastor and prayer? We're getting there, I promise.

For now, recognize how the early church refuses to allow a point of friction to divide them. Widows aren't being fed. That's a problem, and the people bring the problem to the apostles' attention.

An Unexpected Solution

Acts 6:2-6 (ESV)

And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.

Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven

men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

Does their solution surprise you? What about the priorities of the apostles? They are acting as the pastors of the church, by the way.

I mean, think about what just happened. The pastors gather the congregation of thousands of people and say, "You've brought to our attention a problem. But here's the deal: our priority —our role, our unique calling, what we must do— is to devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. We can't let this situation distract us from prayer and preaching."

Bold move. If you were there, you may have wanted to put Peter and the other apostles in a timeout so they can think about what they've just said.

Speaking of a timeout, let's take one from the book of Acts and ask a practical question: What should be in my —Pastor Josh's— job description?

What would you have said if I had asked you before you began reading this booklet?

Imagine we're having a church meeting, and someone claims a bunch of widows at Gateway Church aren't being taken care of. No one is visiting them in the nursing home, helping them get groceries, or helping them get to their doctor's appointments. The issue is brought up before everyone at the church meeting, and everyone is waiting to hear my response.

Would you expect our meeting to play out like what we have been reading in Acts?

A phenomenon in the US church for the last few decades is how our view has changed regarding the role of the pastor.

I went and looked at some job openings for pastors in our denomination. Let me be clear: I wasn't looking at the job openings to apply to them. I just wanted to see what churches claim they're looking for in a pastor. Here's what I found:

- *A Pastor to lead our congregation to a renewed and revitalized future through strong leadership, sound Biblical preaching and teaching, and a passion for pastoral care.*
- *We are seeking an individual that is committed to being a servant leader beyond reproach and be a partner as we become more and more like an Acts 2 church...*
- *We are searching for a dynamic spiritual and administrative church leader to assume the pastoral role...Excellent preaching skills...Excellent written*

and verbal communication skills...Active listening skills.

- *Maintain and carry forward [our church's] vision for ministry through a Christ-centered, collaborative team model which will include Biblical preaching and teaching (30%), leadership and discipleship (30%), administration (20%), and pastoral care (20%).*

Last example:

- *The next pastor of [our] church should be a lover of God and his Word. They will be expected to plan and lead weekly worship services and administer sacraments. We would expect them to visit members and friends of the church, perform weddings, funerals, as well as teach confirmation classes. They should also lead youth programs, Bible studies, and elder training. It is very important in our small community that the pastor regularly participates in community activities and events. They are the moderator of the session and should attend a majority of the EPC presbytery meetings.*

Did you notice something missing? And please know I'm not trying to pick on these churches. What's missing is something any of us could easily overlook. Only four job descriptions of the twenty I looked at even mention what I hope you noticed was missing.

So what's missing?

Prayer!

In fact, there was only one church whose first two qualifications for their pastoral position were: 1) Teach and preach the Word and 2) Shows a strong prayer life.

In Acts 6, the apostles said, "We've got two things on our job description that we have to do: prayer and preach the Word." And though all of the job descriptions I looked at mentioned preaching, only four mentioned prayer. Three are a singular bullet point after things like "proficient at Powerpoint." It's almost like, "Oh yeah, make sure you pray."

Really?

I can imagine a couple of reactions you may be having right now.

"Yeah, but Jesus preached and prayed and could heal people and care for people. He didn't have to split up these responsibilities."

"Can't the pastor pray any time? Does this *really* need to be part of what he's paid to do?"

"I wonder how long it would take for Josh to pray for all the people who come to Gateway Church? And pray for them with something more than, 'God I don't know what's going on in their life, but you do' kind of prayer?"

"I wonder how many people at Gateway Church have no one who prays for them? Maybe they are the only believer in their family, maybe they're married to someone who isn't a Christian, or they have parents who don't support their faith? I wonder who's praying for them?"

How much do you value prayer? How much will we value prayer as a church?

How a Church Gets Things Done

We covered preaching in the last chapter. It's good that churches still prioritize this for the pastor. But what about all of the other things listed in those job descriptions? What about everything you thought of when I asked what should be on my job description?

Here's where we can learn something from the second part of the apostles' statement to the congregation.

They told the people to select seven men, not just anyone, but men with a good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit, and wise. The apostles didn't hand-pick the individuals. The church decided on them.

The apostles appointed these men to oversee the distribution of the goods. It would be this group's responsibility to make sure the widows were being taken care of. The apostles resisted the temptation to allow this problem to distract them from their unique role and responsibilities. They want the widows to be taken care of even though they can't be the ones to care for the widows.

And get this: the plan pleased the congregation. The widows are going to be taken care of and the church leaders will focus on prayer and preaching.

This decision by the early church gets more people involved in the ministry and develops more leaders in the church. In fact, many see this decision as the beginning of a

church role known as deacons — a group in the church who are the chief servants.

And this decision allowed the pastors to stay focused on prayer and preaching.

The Results

Acts 6:7 (ESV)

And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

The word of God continued to increase.

The gospel continued to spread as the apostles focused on their unique role while letting others be the solution to a problem that needed addressed.

And the church continues to grow. The number of disciples multiplied greatly.

What do you want God to do in and through us as a church?

I love our story. I love our history. I hope you do too. And I hope none of us are satisfied with thinking the best part of our story is in our past.

I hope you long for, desire, and are willing to live in such unity as a church that the gospel will cause a multiplication of people to come to faith in Jesus.

I hope you will step into the role God has for you in our church and that you will support me in my role as a pastor who's called to pray and preach God's Word. And I

hope we'll all flourish in the unique role God has created for us in this church.

I pray that we will serve and be served by each other.

I pray we would be thankful for our elders, deacons, and staff. Thankful for those who help park cars, teach preschoolers, lead us in singing, set up tables and chairs, and visit our widows.

And for those who lead us in prayer and by preaching God's Word.

Chapter 4

Other Questions

Why do some churches have women elders/pastors?

It's a somewhat complicated question and answer. The best biblical argument, though I'm afraid I have to disagree with it, is based on Galatians 3:28. For those wanting to study the topic further, I would recommend *Two Views on Women in Ministry* by James Beck (editor).

Can a divorced person serve as an elder/pastor?

God hates divorce. He's also gracious and merciful. We take each case individually when it comes to answering this question. Some questions that must be considered are:

- 1) Did the divorce happen before the person believed in Jesus?
- 2) Were there biblical grounds for the divorce?

What do I do if I feel called to serve as a pastor?

Contact the church office. We'd love to walk alongside you in discerning God's call and through the next steps in training to become a pastor.

Conclusion

I hope this short booklet has provided some clarity on the role of the pastor at Gateway Church. Now you know who a pastor is and what his primary responsibilities are.

One last thing about your pastor: I need your prayers! Please pray for me as I prepare my sermons each week and while I preach them. Pray I continue to be faithful to my spouse, diligent in shepherding my family, and devoted to my calling to preach and to pray as one who will give an account to God.

Books and Resources

Below are some helpful books about pastors, preaching, and prayer.

Elders/Pastors

- *The Elder and His Work* by Dickson
- *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church* by Getz
- *Church Elders* by Rinne
- *Biblical Eldership* by Strauch
- *Gospel Eldership: Equipping a New Generation of Servant Leaders* by Thune

Preaching

- *The Preacher's Catechism* by Allen
- *Reformed Preaching* by Beeke
- *Christ-Centered Preaching* by Chapell
- *A Passionate Plea for Preaching* by Duncan
- *Preaching* by Keller
- *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* by Piper

Prayer

- *Prayer* by Keller
- *Contemplative Prayer* by Merton
- *Calling on the Name of the Lord* by Millar
- *Lift Your Hearts* by Byar



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9555 County Road 9 Findlay, Ohio 45840
(419) 423-5947 | www.gatewayepc.org