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SHEPHERDING

1 Peter 5:1–4

A FRIEND OF mine was hired to be the administrative pastor of a large church. The hire made sense in many ways. He was a Christian, and he loved the local church. He had been successful in the corporate world as an executive. He had a remarkable ability to understand structure in an organization. He had plenty of experience dealing with a staff, and he had a working knowledge of human resource issues. When the leaders of his large church saw a need for someone to run the operations of their church, they knew he was the guy.

And he did what they wanted. Their high expectations were met, and after a short period of time, the church began to run smoother than ever before. Tasks were accomplished, including things that had never been done well before. The lack of order and accountability among the staff was replaced by a strict, policy-driven process that was uniform for all who were employed by the church.

At the same time, there was an unforeseen consequence of these changes, a new reality that arose out of the new structure.

Oversee God's People

Relationally, the staff and the pastors began to grow more distant from each other. Those leading and pastoring began to see the people of the church as a group of numbers instead of as souls needing care. Staff meetings became dominated by conversations about leadership roles and financial stewardship instead of by informal conversations about a church member's job, his family, and how his walk with Jesus was going. What had changed?

While it is true that the administrative improvements were a good thing that allowed the church to function more efficiently, there were some negatives. Improving efficiency brought with it a shift from the personal pastoral care that the staff, leaders, and church members needed. When I asked my friend about this troubling shift, his response was short and to the point: "I am an administrator, not a pastor."

We've written this book because we are convinced that these two callings—administration and shepherding (pastoring)—are not meant to be separate and distinct from one another. In fact, whenever we set administration and pastoring at odds, one will always dominate at the expense of the other. Far too many pastors seek to address the very real need for organization and structure in their growing church at the expense of the souls in their care. Though it is difficult to pinpoint the origin of this conflict, it is now an accepted norm that these two areas are distinct and different, requiring entirely different skill sets and passions. Many church leaders believe it is the responsibility of the pastor to shepherd while some other hired hand administrates.

Shepherding

Yet the Bible gives a different picture as it articulates the calling of a pastor. The apostle Peter exhorts pastors in regard to *what* a pastor is called to do and *how* to do it:

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

1 Peter 5:2–4

Peter does not separate administration from the shepherding task. He lumps them together as different aspects of a pastor's call to shepherd the flock. A pastor is called to *shepherd God's flock under his care*. So, first and foremost, he is called to care for souls, to take a personal interest in the lives of his people. Everything a pastor does has as its goal that the sheep placed under his care get the nourishment and support they need.

Consider what a shepherd does to care for his sheep. He has to buy feed, build fences, transport them, and follow a daily schedule, among other things. Shepherding involves some rather mundane and inglorious tasks, yet every task is undertaken with a view to making sure the sheep receive nourishment and care.

But shepherding the flock of God is not simply caring for widows, visiting the sick, praying for the flock, counseling married couples, training leaders, confronting sin, and discipling

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the weak. Shepherding also means overseeing the day-to-day operations of the local church. It is a biblical calling that, by definition, includes giving attention to practical administrative issues to properly exercise oversight of God's flock.

The unique call of a pastor is to have the biblical knowledge and mindedness to effectively administrate the church within a theological framework. Since shepherding is the chief description of a pastor, administration is always done with a view to caring for the sheep. In other words, administration must flow out of the work of shepherding, as a necessary aspect of effective care.

The apostle Paul had this idea in mind when he exhorted the Ephesian pastors (elders) just before leaving them for the last time: "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28 NASB). Paul refers to the shepherding task as a part of a pastor's calling to be an overseer of the flock of God. In fact, most interpreters conclude that the titles "shepherd" and "overseer" are used interchangeably throughout the New Testament to refer to the pastoral office (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). Pastors are entrusted by the Chief Shepherd to shepherd the flock through the means of *oversight* until Jesus returns for them.

All of this means that the essential tasks of administration and delegation in the local church *cannot* be separated from the call to shepherd God's flock. Shepherds must administrate. And administrators should administrate like shepherds. When we administrate, organize, and delegate without an

Shepherding

understanding of shepherding, it can become a cold and calculated means to achieve efficiency. The church is not just an institution that produces results or grows in size; it is the household of God. The church is filled with redeemed yet broken and hurting souls who need spiritual care. And the church is the community of God's people through which they receive this care under the guidance of God's appointed shepherds on behalf of the Chief Shepherd. Biblical administration needs to be carried out with this understanding in mind.

HOW DO YOU LEAD THE CHURCH WITH WISDOM AND GRACE?

The Bible gives instruction to those called to church leadership, challenging them to “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight . . .” (1 Peter 5:2 ESV). But what does that mean? And how is it done in a way that is faithful to God and effective in enabling growth individually and corporately?

Part of the Practical Shepherding series of resources, *Oversee God’s People* is a treasure trove of focused, biblical tools to equip church leaders and empower church members. Pastors Brian Croft and Bryce Butler combine a theological foundation with practical helps so that church leaders can run an effective day-to-day ministry of administration like a shepherd while empowering church members to effectively use their gifts through wise delegation.

Oversee God’s People unpacks what the Bible teaches about administration and the necessity of delegation in congregational leadership, offering real-world, practical suggestions to improve the structures, processes, and relationships among leaders and laypeople in your church.

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