still not professionals

TEN PLEAS FOR TODAY'S PASTORS



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PREFACE

February 4–6, 2013, we will gather in Minneapolis, God willing, for the annual Desiring God Conference for Pastors. The theme is "Brothers, We Are Still Not Professionals: Reclaiming the Centrality of the Supernatural in Ministry." Just days prior to the conference is the scheduled release of John Piper's revised and expanded book *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry*.

This short ebook is a celebration and extension of that book—born not only from an effort to whet the appetite for the coming conference, but in a hope to bless pastors and other Christian leaders beyond the book and conference.

In October 2012, Desiring God issued invitations to a handful of ministry friends—all of them seasoned pastors whom we deeply respect—to contribute to this ebook. As the chapters came in, we posted them at the Desiring God blog; now that they've all arrived, we are publishing them together in one place as a resource we hope might have a long electronic shelf life.

We asked the contributors to express in these chapters their "heart of hearts" for fellow pastors—what comes to their minds first, or most profoundly, when they think about influencing fellow ministers. Given their unique involvements and contexts, what one thing would they want other pastors to hear?

We readily admit that the experiences and perspectives of our group are limited—the group is made up entirely of pastors in 21st-century North American contexts. However, we believe that the substance of these chapters taps into profound human themes, in both the pastor and his flock, and will be of use for Christian leaders far beyond our limited North American context. This is our prayer.

One more thing to address in this preface: why this ebook is addressed to "brothers" and not to "sisters." Here's how John Piper addresses that question in the preface of his *Brothers* book:

> To those who want me to write for "brothers and sisters," I say, let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind. As for me, the biblical teaching is clear: God calls spiritual, humble, Christlike men to lead the family as husbands and to lead the church as elders (Ephesians 5:20–33;

> 1 Timothy 2:12–13). I believe, and I have experienced for thirty years, that godly, gifted, articulate, intelligent, ministering women flourish in such families and churches.

We, too, in addressing this ebook to the “brothers,” believe that it is not at the expense of our wonderful sisters, but for the sake of their undiminished thriving. We believe that as Christian men step forward to fulfill their callings as Christlike men in the family and the local church, Christian women will flourish.

David Mathis
Executive Editor
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BROTHERS, THE MINISTRY IS SUPERNATURAL

John Piper

It's been ten years since the publication of the book *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*. Nothing has happened in the last ten years to make me think this book is less needed. In fact, instead of going away, the pressure to "professionalize" the pastorate has morphed and strengthened.

Among younger pastors, the talk is less about therapeutic and managerial professionalization, and more about communication or contextualization. The language of "professionalization" is seldom used in these regards, but there is a quiet pressure felt by many pastors: *Be as good as the professional media folks, especially the cool anti-heroes and the most subtle comedians*.

The New Professionalism

This is not the overstated professionalism of the three-piece suit and the power offices of the upper floors, but the understated professionalism of torn blue jeans and the savvy inner ring. This professionalism is not learned in pursuing an MBA, but by being in the know about the ever-changing entertainment and media world.

This is the professionalization of ambience, and tone, and idiom, and timing, and banter. It is more intuitive and less taught. More style and less technique. More feel and less force.

If this can be called *professionalism*, what does it have in common with the older version? Everything that matters. The way I tried to get at the problem ten years ago was to ask some questions. Let me expand that list. Only this time think, old *and* new professionalism.

Is there professional praying?
Professional trusting in God's promises?
Professional weeping over souls?

Professional musing on the depths of revelation?
Professional rejoicing in the truth?
Professional praising God's name?
Professional treasuring the riches of Christ?
Professional walking by the Spirit?
Professional exercise of spiritual gifts?
Professional dealing with demons?
Professional pleading with backsliders?
Professional perseverance in a hard marriage?
Professional playing with children?
Professional courage in the face of persecution?
Professional patience with everyone?

These are not marginal activities in the pastoral life. They are vital.

The Heart of Ministry

Why do we choke on the word *professional* in these connections? Because professionalization carries the connotation of an education, a set of skills, and a set of guild-defined standards which are possible without faith in Jesus or the power of the indwelling Spirit of God.

Professionalism does not usually carry the connotation of being supernatural. But the heart of ministry is supernatural.

Professional Crucifixion?

There is a professional way to crucify. But there is no profession al way to be crucified. There were professionals on Golgotha. They were experts in torture. But Jesus was not one of them.

For Paul, the ministry was more like being crucified than crucifying. "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (Galatians 6:17). "I am crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20). "I die every day!" (1 Corinthians 15:31). "For the sake of Christ I am content with weaknesses" (2 Corinthians 12:10). "He was crucified in weakness… we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God" (2 Corinthians 13:4). "We are the aroma of Christ… a fragrance from death to death… a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Corinthians 2:15–16).

Pastors say, “Who is sufficient for these things!” And then they look to God. Professionals say, “Education and training and savvy are sufficient.” And then they look to experts.

Leaning on God for Effect

Pastors do not look to their eloquence for the supernatural fruit they long for. “My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:4–5).

Whatever gifts and eloquence a pastor may have, whatever preparations he makes, he looks away from them all to God for every spiritual effect.

He knows what he is after. And he knows that no human effort and no human excellence can bring it about. He wants people to be raised from the dead (Ephesians 2:5). He wants people to be set free from lifelong bondage (2 Timothy 2:25–26). He wants camels to pass through the eyes of needles (Mark 10:25–27). Therefore, at every turn, he seeks to “serve by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and dominion forever and ever” (1 Peter 4:11).

Supernatural Goals and Means

The goals are supernatural, and the means are supernatural. Conversions and conformity to Christ are the supernatural fruit of serving in the supernatural strength of Christ. Only Christ can do this.

Ministry is discovering how to live happily in the all-accomplishing hands of the risen Christ.

This is a plea for pastors to put the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the power of Christ-exalting truth, and the purity of holy living, above the pragmatic considerations of organization, and above our concerns with compelling style.

And if this sounds like a prescription for careless, sloppy, distracting ministry, turn now to the next chapter, “Brothers, Supernatural Does Not Mean Stupid.”

Brothers, the ministry is supernatural.

BROTHERS, SUPERNATURAL DOES NOT MEAN STUPID

John Piper

If somebody reads the last chapter and says, “So, then, you think it doesn’t matter if we sing off key, preach incompetently, and don’t provide parking?” my answer is, “That’s just stupid.”

It matters whether you think the only alternative to tacky is “professional.” If the only way you have for urging excellence in your church is to urge “professionalism,” I suggest you need a bigger vocabulary.

The baggage attached to the word “professionalism” is not helpful, if you are trying to be a supernatural people of God. And that is what we want to be: body of Christ, chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, people of God’s own possession, temple of the Holy Spirit, household of God, saints, called, Way, bride of Christ, and more. It is not helpful to aim at being a “professional” bride.

Where the Quest Begins

So when I renounce the pursuit of professionalism, does that mean I don’t aspire to excellence? No. But I do start my quest for excellence with the quest for excellent forgiveness. Excellent mercy. Excellent patience. Excellent kindness. Excellent humility. Excellent self-control. Excellent gospel-walking (Galatians 2:14).

That’s what Paul had in mind when he told us to imitate the infinitely excellent God. “Be imitators of God… And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (Ephesians 5:1–2). I don’t know if Jesus could sing on key, or if his tunic was wrinkle-free, but I do know his capacities for returning good for evil were beautiful beyond words. The radical quest for that excellence is where we begin.

The Quest Broadens

Then Paul broadens the quest: “Whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philippians 4:8). So after our hearts undergo a gospel renovation, the next room for refurbishing is our mind: Think on these excellent things. Fill your mind with excellence. Beauty. Justice. Purity. Honor.

Then the next thing out of Paul’s mouth is this: “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things” (Philippians 4:9). So the gospel-renovated heart and the excellence-refurbished mind both “practice these things.” It matters how things are done. At home. At church. Everywhere. We “practice” excellence.

Seasoned with Mission

So do we build magnificent buildings? Maybe. But not many. The priority put on opulence in the Old Testament palace and temple was owing to an era of “come-see-religion.” Like the Queen of Sheba who came to Israel and was breathless at Solomon’s wealth (1 Kings 10:5).

But the New Testament has none of that emphasis on opulence, because it is a “go-tell-religion.” The mission impulse dominates the domestic impulse. We are sojourners. We are sent. “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics” (Luke 9:3). This saying is not normative for all mission, but it does flavor everything.

So the quest for excellence is always seasoned by a mission-oriented mentality, with a bent toward simplicity. It’s a bent, not an absolute. There may be a place for a cathedral here and there. But the people of God won’t lean toward living in pal aces. And the vast work of the kingdom will happen mainly in the rugged outposts.

Undistracting Excellence

But what about the way we do things? What about music, for example? We recall the psalmist saying, “Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and *beauty* are in his sanctuary” (Psalm 96:6). “Sing to him a new song; play

skillfully on the strings" (Psalm 33:3). Beautifully. Skillfully. Does that mean professionally? In all my years of pastoral ministry, I have never prayed that worship be done professionally.

The category we have found most helpful is "undistracting excellence." The adjective "undistracting" means that the quality of an act must help, rather than hinder, the spiritual aims of the ministry. Lead worshipers aim by the power of God's Spirit (1 Peter 4:11) to awaken the mind's attention and the heart's affections to the truth and beauty of God and the gospel. The kind of singing and playing that helps this happen is not well described as "professional."

Seeking a Miracle

But "undistracting excellence" helps us get at the issue. It reminds us that people are distracted not only by shoddy music, but also by the flare of musical finesse. Corporate worship is not a recital. The sanctuary is no orchestra hall. The shouted "Bravissimo!" for a virtuoso performance (which may be totally appropriate at the concert hall) has the opposite focus from what we are seeking on Sunday morning. We are seeking the miracle of communion with God.

The same applies to preaching. On the one hand, elders are to be "apt to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2). Gifted. Able. Skilled. Effective. On the other hand, there is a kind of smooth, effortless oratory, and a kind of cool, clever, hip, and even studied casualness that can be just as distracting from the presence of God as the self-conscious awkwardness of the nervous beginner.

Spiritual Does Not Mean Shoddy

Undistracting excellence means that content, language, tone, gesture, and demeanor will all serve the spiritual aims of the message: the quickening of the dead and the building up of faith in the saints by the power of God. There is no professional raising of the dead. And no professional building of the temple of the soul.

Therefore, brothers, we are (still) not professionals. Our aims are supernatural. Therefore, our means are stirred and shaped by the Spirit of God. The excellence we seek serves a spiritual communion with God. It is undistracting. But spiritual does not mean shoddy. And supernatural does not mean stupid.

BROTHERS, WE ARE NOT SISTERS

Douglas Wilson

To say that one thing is not another thing is not to register a complaint against either. To say that the sun is not the moon is not to criticize the moon, and to say that the land is not the sea is not to file a complaint against the sea. God establishes differences in the world with the intention of them complementing one another, and not so that his variegated world would try to melt itself down into one great indistinguishable mass. A pine cone is not a cheesecake is not a covered bridge. A man is not a woman, but God bless them both.

And so to exhort my brothers in the ministry to remember that they are not sisters is in no way a form of disdain, either open or disguised, toward the sisters. As brothers in ministry, there are many things we must learn from the sisters, and we must take care to learn these things carefully and appropriately.

For just one example, the apostle Paul says he was gentle among the Thessalonians, the way a nurse with small children would be (1 Thessalonians 2:7). The Bible says that women should not set up to teach the men authoritatively (1 Timothy 2:12), but this is a very different thing than men learning from women (Acts 18:26). How on earth would it be possible for a man to live with his wife with understanding (1 Peter 3:7) without learning anything from her?

Masculine Presence in the Pulpit

That said, in these egalitarian times, we must insist on a masculine presence in the pulpit because the church is the bride of Christ, and needs to obey her husband in everything (Ephesians 5:24). The Lord requires this of us (1 Timothy 2:12), and so that is what we must do. The individual man in the pulpit must be masculine because the bride of Christ must be feminine. The appropriate feminine response of the Church is to be submissive, and you cannot be

submissive while disobeying.

But as we accept this responsibility as the wisdom of God, and embrace it on that basis, we should not be surprised if a number of additional incentives and reasons occur to us as well.

For the Sake of Young Men

We must be masculine in our ministry for the sake of many young men entering the ministry—men who grew to manhood without an appropriate role model in their father. We are their fathers in the work now, and so we must model for them what this kind of masculinity looks like—what courage with an open book looks like.

The Bible teaches that the best forms of learning are imitative, and if we want the next generation of preachers to grow up into a true masculinity, then there must be a masculinity out there that they can see in order to imitate. But before we can model it, we must learn it ourselves.

For the Sake of the Women

We must be masculine in our ministry for the sake of the women in our congregations. Because men are naturally competitive, they are more prone to see the differences between the sexes in terms of that competition. Women are more realistic at this point, and do not make this mistake as often.

The best thing in the church for the *women* is for the men to be men. For a man to teach the word of God with authority (and not as the scribes) is not withholding anything from the women at all—it is a *gift* to the women. Godly women are grieved by usurping women, and annoyed by effeminate men. They are fed by men who teach the Bible with boldness. They need that sort of provision and protection, and they know that they do. We should know that also.

Erasing an Old Perception

We must be masculine in our ministry in order to help erase the centuries-old perception of clergymen as the “third sex.” We have a word from the Lord for the nations around us, and they will not be able to hear us if all that comes from us is a diffident bleating. The Lord chose the sons of Zebedee as his “sons of

thunder," and as we consider the state of our nation around us, we should long for him to choose out some more.

The humidity levels of our spiritual stupidity are oppressive, and our sins and iniquities have created a mugginess that feels like the atmosphere on Jupiter on a hot afternoon. What we need is five or six first-rate Midwestern thunderstorms to clear all of that away. Nothing is more apparent than that we need for some masculine preachers to cut loose.

The Pulpit: Public Place of Courage

This relates to the last point, which is that we must be masculine in our ministry because the pulpit ought to be the sort of public place where it takes courage to stand. And it is this sort of statement that reveals just how sensitized to unbelieving propaganda we have become. If we say that men should step into pulpits because it should take courage to do so, the retort will come back immediately that we must not believe that women can be courageous. The reply is simple—to say the pulpit is a place that requires courage of a sort peculiar to men is not to say that courage is non-existent or unnecessary everywhere else. But this is just a small sampling of what a minister of the gospel must be willing to do—he must be willing to be misunderstood and misrepresented in ways just like this.

Our battles over women's ordination are often misguided in emphasis. We ought to spend less time trying to keep the women from becoming men in the pulpit, and more time teaching men to become men in the pulpit.

Brothers, we are not sisters.

BROTHERS, WE ARE NOT PROFESSORS

R. C. Sproul, Jr.

It has been said by one great Reformed theologian that we are living in the most anti-intellectual age in the church's history. We are the TV generation, making way for the Internet generation. Images tickle our eyes, and sound-bites massage our brains. We are, compared to our Puritan fathers, ignorant shepherds leading sensate sheep in a dry and dusty land. Surely what we need then is more thought, more scholarship, more earnest hours spent pouring over the ancients in our studies. Right?

We are worldly when we, like the world around us, give ourselves to an entertainment mentality, when we amuse ourselves to death. We are still worldly, however, when we rightly reject the eye candy and froth of pop culture and then conclude that our problems are intellectual, and our solutions more learning. It was the Enlightenment, not the Light of the World, that gave us education as its high and holy sacrament. What Jesus calls us to is to repent and believe the gospel. It is more important to us and our sheep that we would learn to believe more, than that we would find more to believe.

The Call of the Shepherd

That means first that when we prepare to serve in the ministry, we have to prepare to serve in the ministry. Our seminaries, if we must have them, should more reflect a training hospital than a university. Divinity is not a body of knowledge to be mastered like geology. The Bible is not a book to be dissected like *Moby Dick*. We go there, if we must go there, not to study the Word, but to begin to learn to have the Word study us. We go to pursue not advanced degrees but the fruit of the Spirit. We go to lose our reputations, not to gain them. We go not to be thought wise, but to learn what fools we are.

That means next that when we are called to the ministry, that we minister.

Our pulpits, sadly, are filled with men who started as seminarians eager to shepherd a flock. There they were introduced to a dynamic, likely godly professor, and suddenly the student determines he will pursue still more degrees, that he might follow in the footsteps of his hero. As seminary comes to a close, growing debts, a growing family, and a growing urge to go and teach derail the plan to become a professor. Instead the young pastor determines to take a church that his flock can become his student body, and His Body, a tiny little seminary. He will lecture then during Sunday School, and regale them through each sermon.

The Shepherd, however, calls us to feed His Sheep. We are not to give our wisdom, our insights, the fruits of our scholarship. Rather, like Paul before us, we serve up our weakness, our frailty, our need. That's how the Word breaks through, where the power comes from.

Fools for Jesus

Brothers, your flock may need some more information. What they need more, however, is someone to lead them, to show them the Way. They need to see you repenting. They need to see you wrestling with your sins. They need to see you preaching the gospel to yourself, not because you like the sound of your voice, but because you hate the sin that yet remains, and you need grace. They need to see you rejoicing in the fullness of his promises, and mourning both sin and its fruit, the last enemy, death.

No man needs advanced degrees, and arcane letters after his name in order to follow Jesus. Which means that no man needs these things to lead others in following Jesus. If you follow him, they will follow you. If, however, you merely tickle their brains, they will soon go off in pursuit of someone who seems smarter than you. If they are taught to hear your voice, they won't discern the voice of the Master.

When our days of ministry come to an end, our labors will either be dust, or they will be dust. No matter how many downloads our wisdom garners, no matter how many journals publish our insights, these will all one day decay. Our scholars' hoods and robes, pulpits and libraries will become mere chaff.

If, however, we spend our days as shepherds, pasturing the flock, our labors will last forever. For we minister to dust, to men into whom the Spirit breathed twice. We minister to dust that is, through faithful, pastoral preaching, being burnished into the image of the Pearl of Great Price. Brothers, we are not doctors, but the sick—not scholars, but fools. Let us then be fools for Christ.

Preach.

BROTHERS, WE ARE NOT SUPERSTARS

Daniel L. Akin

Jesus summarizes the purpose of his incarnation in Mark 10:45 when he says, “Even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

This profound and crucial statement—which weds the “Son of Man” of Daniel 7:13–14 to the “Suffering Servant” of Isaiah 52–53, and redefines what kind of Messiah-Savior our Lord would be—comes on the heels of James’s and John’s request that Jesus would give them seats on his right and left in Glory (Mark 10:37). James and John are crystal clear in their intentions and goal: They want status, not service. They want the position of a king, not the calling of a slave. They want to be looked up to, honored, and revered. They wanted to be superstars, not servants.

Don’t Play the Ostrich

Tragically, today, when it comes to the ministry, the standards and criteria for success are too often culled from the world, and not from the Word of God. To deny this is to play the ostrich, stick our head in the sand, and simply ignore the massive evidence that swirls around us. Allow me to share what I see.

Evangelicals have their cult-heroes and cult followings. This is true both inside and outside the local church. We have our groupies who pine after their “Christian rock stars.” Such stars are given almost infallible status, at least by their devoted fans, and if they are not careful, they may begin to believe what blogs, fans, and fellow superstars say.

Suddenly, the green monster of pride sneaks into their lives and an attitude of entitlement begins to transform a once gracious and humble servant into a hulk-like prima donna who less and less resembles the simple carpenter from Galilee. Subtly, over time, I convince myself that I deserve a six-figure salary. I deserve

to live in a big home and drive an expensive car. I deserve to have people wait on me hand and foot and respond immediately to my every request. Furthermore, they can expect to receive a quick and painful tongue-lashing if they move too slowly or fail to meet my exalted expectations. Why, I may even fire them for not measuring up to my personal expectations.

I become too important and my time is too valuable to meet with common people, people who cannot help me further my agenda. I am too busy in "my ministry" to respond to letters, answer emails, return phone calls, or schedule appointments. And amazingly, I become almost self-righteous in defending my lifestyle, my perks, and my prideful behavior because what I do is valuable to the kingdom and I've earned the right to be treated as one of its kings.

Battling the Green Monster

I wish what I have written to this point was theoretical or at least hyperbolic. Sadly, it isn't.

As someone who has been in the Christian ministry for 35 years, and who battles daily the green monster of pride, I have seen and continue to see this superstar mentality and lifestyle far too often among a number of current day pastors. You see, I am now a seminary president who, if not careful, can get caught up in all of this "malarkey." I am easily seduced by the sirens who feed a superstar mentality that knows nothing of the way of Jesus.

So, what biblical counsel and wisdom can help keep our heads out of the clouds and our feet on the ground where "real people" live? Let me offer one avenue of Scriptural exhortation that may help.

Our Model of Leadership

Keep continually before you the biblical model of leadership. We are not CEOs. We are not professionals. Brothers, we are shepherds—and under-shepherds at that. We are servant-leaders. First Peter 5:2 instructs us to "shepherd the flock of God that is among you." The word "shepherd" is an imperative receiving the force of a command. Shepherds who follow in the footsteps of the "Good Shepherd" (John 10:11), the "Chief Shepherd" (1 Peter 5:4), the "Great Shepherd" (Heb. 13:20), will love and lead their sheep. They will not drive them and use them and make ungodly carnal demands of them. They will continually remind themselves that they tend over "the flock of God" and not their own.

They also understand it is the “flock of God *among you*.” That means they live with their sheep, they spend time with their sheep, they know their sheep, they care for their sheep.

With Joy and a Clear Conscience

I once heard a famous and well-known pastor brag about the fact he had never had a single meal in the home of one of his members, nor had he ever invited any of his members into his home for one. When I asked him why, he simply responded, “I never wanted to get that close to any of my people.” Words cannot express how this broke my heart. It still grieves me to this day.

Brothers, we never have been and never will be superstars. We are lowly shepherds, servants of the “Great Shepherd of the sheep.” One day we will give him an account for the souls we are keeping watch over (Hebrews 13:17). May we by his grace and for his glory do so with joy and a clear conscience, serving him and his sheep “honorably in all things” (Hebrews 13:18).

BROTHERS, WE SHOULD STINK

Thabiti Anyabwile

These days, pastoral ministry has become more glamorous, fabulous, and fashionable than ever. We hear nowadays of pastors driving expensive cars, being chauffeured, owning private jets, and living in opulent mansions. Once only "the prosperity preachers" and bona fide hucksters touted such lives; now your neighborhood "orthodox" super-pastor does the same. It's all so pretty, perfumed with the world's "best" of everything.

But, brothers, we are not professional models or entertainers hawking the world's airbrushed version of "the good life" from the lofty heights and flashing lights of public adulation. Brothers, we are shepherds down in the fields of life—and we should stink.

Do We Live Among Them?

Our model of ministry comes from the faithful shepherds and fellow elders of the holy Scriptures. Men like the apostle Paul who defended his ministry, in part, by appealing to his life with the sheep. He writes in 1 Thessalonians 1:5, "You know how we lived among you for your sake."

I'm challenged by the apostle's confidence here. Here's a man that could describe himself as formerly a blasphemer, persecutor, and violent man (1 Timothy 1:15). He was no perfectionist. He felt himself to be trapped in a wretched body of sin that warred with the Spirit (Romans 7). Yet, I find it remarkable that without flinching, and without caveat, he can call upon the Thessalonians' own memories of him to testify to the blamelessness of his life.

Many of us won't hesitate to swear by our own lives but would tremble in fear if our people were asked, "How does he live among you?" We can talk of ourselves in ways that excuse our failings, justify our sins, and shift the blame we deserve. But some of us would panic if the reputation of the gospel came

down to the testimony of our people about our lives.

Paul Didn't Phone It In

We all know the message we preach is better than the messengers who preach it, but that doesn't mean the messenger should settle beneath the message. There must be a striving to be what we are in Christ, so that the message is adorned and defended by the messenger's life. If we find this is not the case, we should either repent or leave the ministry.

Notice carefully Paul's words: "…how we lived *among you*…." It's not just "how we lived," which could be reported from afar, airbrushed and beautified for the pages of *Jerusalem Home Journal*. Paul says—with confidence—you know how we lived "*among you*." He's no absentee apostle or church planter. He doesn't "phone it in."

Smelling Like the Sheep

The apostle understands that shepherds should smell like sheep. The sheep's wool should be lint on our clothes. Our boots should be caked with their mud and their mess. Our skin ought to bear teeth marks and the weather-beaten look of exposure to wind, sun, and rain in the fields. We belong among the people to such an extent that they can be called on to honestly testify that our lives as messengers commend the message. We should be so frequently among them that we smell like them, that we smell like their real lives, sometimes fragrant but more often sweaty, musty, offensive, begrimed from battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Our people should be able to testify that we "lived among them *for their sake*." Our living with them is to benefit them. We should be welcomed among the people because our presence means spiritual gladness and profit (Hebrews 13:17). The goal of all our living is the blessing of all our people. That's why we come and dwell among them.

An Insidious Idea Aboard

The more gifted we think ourselves to be, the more closely we should live among them. There's an insidious idea abroad that suggests that the more gifted

the pastor, the less time he has to be with the sheep. It implies that being with the people is a hindrance better left to less gifted men.

The power of the gospel does not depend upon the giftedness of the messenger. Everyone God has saved in the cause of our preaching has been saved *despite* the messenger—not because of him. Even Paul—arguably the most gifted Christian ever—would rather boast in his weakness. Here you have a messenger, keenly aware of his brokenness, living out both his brokenness and his giftedness among the sheep for their benefit.

Stop Pimping the Sheep

Let me admit that there are limitations we pastors face. Some of them may be due to the size of our churches. Some may be due to the vastness of the region over which our people are scattered. Most of us don't live in Baxter's Kidderminster. Some of our limitations may be based on good priorities—like spending more time training leaders than attending certain social functions. I want to allow every good caveat and qualification necessary.

But if our hearts say either we're too gifted or too big to be with our people, we should stop pretending we're motivated by their benefit. We should stop pretending we're not pimping them or feeding on them. If we honestly feel we're too gifted to be with them, we're not shepherds. We're wolves.

Plan to Get Smelly

Do you know how to tell the difference between sheep and wolves in sheep's clothing? Sheep eat grass; wolves eat sheep—it doesn't matter how prettily they are dressed.

Paul was among the Thessalonians for their profit. It was so obvious that he could confidently call them to testify to it. That's the kind of messenger in whose hands the message ought to be trusted.

A powerful message in the hands of a humble messenger among the people is how God normally works. Brothers, we should smell like sheep. Do we have a plan for regularly getting smelly with the sheep?

BROTHERS, LIVE A VISIBLE, EXEMPLARY, EVERYDAY LIFE

Jeff Vanderstelt

As I mentor and coach leaders in North American churches, I find a common theme among many pastors: They live and lead in such a way so as to disqualify themselves as elders in their own churches.

Living “Among” the Flock

First of all, they are not living and leading “among.” First Peter 5:2–4 exhorts the elders to “shepherd the flock of God that is *among you… being an example to the flock*.”

When meeting with a leader, I will often ask, “Are you living in such a way that people can see your life and follow your example?” In other words, is your daily life visible, accessible, and reproducible? Not visible and accessible to everyone, of course—your life and home are just not that big, and hopefully you are not the only leader. But is your life visible and accessible to everyday people? Can people see your marriage, your parenting, your interaction with neighbors and others? From watching your life, can they see what their life would look like if they loved Jesus and lived for him daily?

Jesus lived among his disciples, and they could say that they saw, touched, and heard the Word in flesh. Paul reminded the church in Ephesus that they knew how he lived because he lived among them in the everyday stuff of life. It’s a beautiful thing when those who have open access to your life and see who you really are in everyday life, regularly say to you, “We don’t understand what’s the big deal about you. Why would anyone ask you to come speak? You’re just a regular guy like everyone else!”

Living Visibly and Accessibly

Do they see you struggle as a parent, work through tension with your wife, repent from your idolatry, and regularly share how in need of grace you are?

This visibility and accessibility helps to keep us grounded—less prone to become overly impressed with ourselves. It also keeps us in the know of what people, including ourselves, need from our teaching. We know the struggles. We see the challenges. We fail. So, when we teach, we are able to speak from both a real awareness of what we all are going through and a credibility that we are struggling in community with the same things.

Unfortunately, many pastors find that the majority of their life includes working in an office, seeing people at church gatherings, meeting with their staff, and primarily just hanging out with their own family. How will people know what it looks like to live out gospel convictions in everyday life if they never see the leaders of the church live it out in front of them?

Living the Way We Call Our People to Live

Second, far too many pastors are not living the life they call everyone else in their congregation to live. They have given themselves permission to be the exception to the norm. What does your church expect of its members? Are you setting an example to the flock by doing what you expect others to do?

I have had countless conversations with pastors who expect the people in their congregation to be in a small group or a missional community, while they excuse themselves from the same expectation. Or, they conclude that the staff meeting together or the elders regularly meeting together is the equivalent of a small group. Really? If you are going to come to that conclusion, please give your people the freedom to count their regular business meeting with their staff at work as their small group. Or free up your members to only meet with the people they like doing life with. Forget calling them to reach the unlovable, the broken, the “much-grace-necessary” people. Unfortunately, that is much of what takes place in the church because the members are following the example of their leaders.

Leaders, whatever you ask the church to do as normative, set the example by doing it yourself.

Living the Biblical Requirements

Third, often I find that elders fail to live out the biblical requirements for overseers that we find in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:7–9. Not all of the requirements, of course, but I do see a pattern around some of them today. And this pattern, I believe, is connected to seeing the elders primarily as the professional teachers.

Most leaders I meet with take seriously the requirement of being able to teach sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. What they don't tend to take as seriously are the requirements of being hospitable, not being a lover of money, and having a good reputation with outsiders.

Living Hospitably

Hospitality means making space for the stranger in your world. Too often Christians think hospitality is just a group of Christians meeting over a meal. That is not the biblical meaning of the concept.

A better picture is what God has done in Christ Jesus for us. He has made a place for his enemies to become part of his family by Jesus being treated like an enemy on the cross. He brought us into his home, treated us like family, and gave us access to all that he owns, making us co-heirs with Christ. When leaders open their homes and lives to the stranger—the outsider—we show the world and the church how the gospel reshapes our view of our homes.

I have found too often that pastors have given themselves a pass on this one. They often say that their home is their refuge, and they fail to remember that Jesus is our refuge, not our homes. Our homes are one of the primary places of ministry according to the Scriptures. Our churches need to see pastors lead by example in this area so their example will lead to every Christian home becoming a place of ministry for those outside of the family of God.

Living for More Than a Paycheck

Not being a lover of money could be restated as *not doing ministry primarily for a paycheck*. Jesus referred to this kind of shepherd as a hired hand whom he would not entrust with the care of his sheep.

I often ask pastors, "Would you do what you're doing, even if you weren't

paid for it?" Many would not. They see the pastorate as a career, not a calling. Please do not forget the grace of God that has enabled you to serve Jesus and his sheep with the best of your time. We are not *paid* to do ministry, we are *freed up* financially for ministry.

If you or your church believes you do ministry because you are being paid, the example you are setting is that the only ones who do ministry are paid workers. This leads to further professionalization of the ministry—where only a few do ministry, while the many just watch the paid professionals.

This can also lead to a pastor seeing his 40–50 hours of work each week as "ministry" and the rest of his time being primarily family or personal time. The problem with this is that most church leaders ask their members to give extra time outside of their 40–50-hour workweek to the work of the church. There is hypocrisy here. Leaders, you are asking your church to do something you are not willing to do.

Living Among Non-Christians

Lastly, having a good reputation with outsiders means you have non-Christians in your life that would call you their friend. They invite you to their parties and events, call you when they are in need, and regularly bring you into their world. They not only call you friend, but they also respect you—you have a good reputation with them. It doesn't mean they always agree with you or are never offended by the gospel, but regardless, they believe you love them and in turn entrust themselves to you.

A few years ago, during a party at my neighbor's home, I had a very direct and heated conversation with my neighbor and some of her friends about the reality of coming judgment. I pleaded with her to put her hope in Jesus as the only means by which she would stand in the day of judgment.

The next day I knocked on her door and asked if everything was okay. She said, "What do you mean?" I then recounted the conversation of the previous night and my concern that it might have hurt our relationship. To which she replied, "You're my friend, Jeff. I know you love me. I expect you to tell me about Jesus. That's what you believe. It doesn't change our friendship at all." I have a good reputation with her. As a result, she sends people who are asking spiritual questions to my wife and me. One of the lines she says when introducing me is, "This is Jeff. The guy I told you about — you know, the pastor that is not like most pastors…"

I'm always glad, and sad, to hear her say that. Glad, because she sees me as

her friend who is a regular guy who loves Jesus. Sad, because she doesn’t see most pastors this way. I hope this will change.

BROTHERS, PRAISE SOMEBODY OTHER THAN GOD

Sam Crabtree

Brothers, praise somebody other than God.

I can hear blasphemy sirens going off in readers' minds. If "somebody other than God" means "somebody *instead* of God," or "*more* than God," the concern is warranted indeed. But if "somebody other than God" means "because God is honored by it," that's another thing entirely.

Commending Whom God Commends

Is it possible that God actually receives *more* honor from us when we praise somebody other than God? The answer can be yes. In the same way that the heavens are declaring the glory of God (Psalm 19:1), God's common kindness in everyone around us (both saint and sinner) is declaring his glory as well. But just as God does not receive as much glory when we fail to pause, observe the heavens, and verbalize our praise, so he does not receive as much glory when we fail to pause, observe his goodness in others' lives, and verbalize our praise.

So, we could say, "Brothers, praise somebody other than God, *for God's sake*." Or even, "Brothers, agree with God, and commend somebody he commends."

Merely praising somebody other than God isn't enough. God isn't necessarily honored by that. The question is, How can we praise somebody other than God *for God's glory*?

God-Centered Praise for Those Who Are Not God

We do it by praising persons who are not God in a God-centered way, by praising them for being godly, for being Christlike, by commending them for God's glory, by applauding them for doing something good in the strength God supplies (1 Peter 4:11). This is how we complete the loop when Jesus teaches us that people should let their lights so shine that others see their good works… and what? Glorify their Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16). If we don't glorify God for people's good works, we miss the point of Jesus's teaching and the point of their good works, which are works that are… what? Good! We must recognize them as such, and say so. And they did those good works, because God was at work in them. So he gets the final, ultimate credit.

For many of us, our churches and homes and offices and marketplaces are full of people doing good works in the strength God supplies. Our job is to get for God the glory he deserves by calling out the goodness he's worked through others and commending it openly.

God Praises Others

God himself—to whom all praise is finally due—praises others. Is he violating his own most basic revelation? As a jealous God, he permits no competition. "You shall have no other gods before me," he says in Exodus 20:3. "Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the Lord alone, shall be devoted to destruction," says Exodus 22:20. "Let no one boast in men," enjoins the apostles Paul (1 Corinthians 3:21).

God straightforwardly warns the wise, the mighty, and the rich to not boast in anything but him.

> Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 9:23–24)

Jesus Joins the Chorus

Jesus himself says, "No one is good except God alone" (Mark 10:18). If God alone is good, how can I exhort us to praise anyone else? Even more startling,

how can *God* praise anyone else? Well, Jesus models such praise of others, calling Nathaniel a man in whom is no guile, calling his disciples salt and light, saying his followers are more valuable than many sparrows, saying the woman of ill repute did a beautiful thing, marveling at the faith of the centurion, commending the woman of great faith, and more.

God the Father describes Noah as righteous in his generation, Jabez as more honorable than his brothers, and Solomon as very great and even majestic. And what does the Bible say we are to do with the noble woman of Proverbs 31? *She is to be praised!* (Proverbs 31:30).

Well Done, Good and Faithful Servant

There is something defective about a person who does not want to be praised by God. Every person in existence should want to hear God say at the end of his life, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:23). Humble yourself before the Lord, and he will exalt you (James 4:10). And when we are so praised, we will immediately deflect the praise to God saying, “It was God’s grace at work in me.” We get the praise — and the joy of deflecting it back to him.

We should desire to be like Paul when he says, “Our boast is this: the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God” (2 Corinthians 1:12). Paul is boasting about his own behavior—but only by the grace of God. So affirmation travels horizontally toward people and passes vertically through them to God where it lands.

For God’s Good and Ours

If anything is commendable, we should take delight in commending it. We are commanded to esteem our leaders very highly because of their work in the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13).

When we become fountains of affirmation, God gets the honor he deserves, others are refreshed, we gain a hearing (people tend to be influenced by those who commend them), general morale is lifted, our mouths are filled with praise instead of complaint and grumbling, and good things are increasingly valued and are more likely to be repeated.

So, brothers, for God’s sake, praise somebody other than God.

BROTHERS, BUILD A GOSPEL CULTURE

Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr.

Gospel doctrine creates a gospel culture. The doctrines of grace create a culture of grace, a social environment of acceptance and hope and freedom and joy. Jesus himself touches us through his truths to create a new kind of community. Without the doctrines, the culture alone is fragile. Without the culture, the doctrines alone appear pointless.

Isn't the doctrine-creating-culture dynamic what we find in the New Testament? For example, the doctrine of regeneration creates a culture of humility (Ephesians 2:1–9). The doctrine of justification creates a culture of inclusion (Galatians 2:11–16). The doctrine of reconciliation creates a culture of peace (Ephesians 2:14–16). The doctrine of sanctification creates a culture of life (Romans 6:20–23). The doctrine of glorification creates a culture of hope (Romans 5:2) and honor (Romans 12:10). The doctrine of God—what could be more basic than that? — creates a culture of honesty and confession (1 John 1:5–10).

No Doctrinal Shortcuts

If we want this culture to thrive, we can't take doctrinal shortcuts. If we want this doctrine to be credible, we can't disregard the culture. Churches where the doctrines of grace create a culture of grace bear living witness to the power of Jesus. I think of it very simply like this:

Gospel doctrine – gospel culture = hypocrisy
Gospel culture – gospel doctrine = fragility
Gospel doctrine + gospel culture = power

If we want our churches to compel the attention of our mission field—and, of course, we do—then, brothers, build a gospel culture! Don't settle for preaching the truth only. Build a relational ethos that *feels* like the gospel. It's powerful.

Not an Optional Add-on

Francis Schaeffer, in his book *The Church Before the Watching World* (page 62), wrote this:

> One cannot explain the explosive dynamite, the *dunamis*, of the early church apart from the fact that they practiced two things simultaneously: orthodoxy of doctrine and orthodoxy of community in the midst of the visible church, a community which the world could see. By the grace of God, therefore, the church must be known simultaneously for its purity of doctrine and the reality of its community. Our churches have so often been only preaching points with very little emphasis on community, but exhibition of the love of God in practice is beautiful and must be there.

A gospel community is authoritative. Schaeffer used the phrase "*orthodoxy* of community" to say that. The beauty of human relationships is not an optional add-on for an otherwise complete, biblical church. Gospel culture is as essential to our witness as gospel doctrine.

Do you consider purity of doctrine essential? Probably. Do you consider beauty of community essential? Hopefully.

The urgency of this depends primarily, of course, on who God is. If God has revealed himself to us as truth only, then beauty of community is merely a preference for certain personality types. But if God has revealed himself as truth and love, both simultaneously, then the beauty of true community is authoritative. And it *is* authoritative: "Let the peace of Christ *rule* in your hearts" (Colossians 3:15).

Wonderful Grace

Theologically conscientious churches are not always gospel cultures. The Reverend William Still, a patriarch of the Church of Scotland in the twentieth century, preaching on Romans 5:5 and the love of God being poured into our hearts, said this:

I wonder what it is about poring all over a great deal of Puritan literature that makes so many preachers of it so horribly cold. I don't understand it, because I think it's a wonderful literature.… I don't know if you can explain this to me. I'd be very glad to know, because it worries me. But I hear over and over and over again this tremendous tendency amongst people who delve deeply into Puritan

literature that a coldness, a hardness, a harshness, a ruthlessness—anything but sovereign grace—enters into their lives and into their ministries. Now, it needn't be so. And it isn't always so, thank God. And you see, the grace, the grace, of a true Calvinist and Puritan—that is to say, a biblical Puritan and Calvinist—is wonderful.… But O God, deliver us from this coldness!

The problem is not Reformed theology. Inherent within that theology is a humbling and melting power. The problem is when that theology is not allowed to exert its natural influence. Instead, our own native religiosity can create a culture contrary to our theology. And our religious culture, whatever it is, reveals what we *really* believe as opposed to what we *think* we believe.

If we are ungracious in our relationships and ethos and demeanor and vibe, then we are contradicting the very grace we preach and disempowering our churches in the eyes of the watching world.

But when we press our theology humbly and boldly into the culture of our churches, starting with ourselves and our own need for God's grace, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is!" (Psalm 133:1).

BROTHERS, TRAIN UP THE NEXT GENERATION

Mike Bullmore

I find there is a persistent temptation in my life and ministry. It is the temptation to just finish my own race faithfully.

"What's wrong with that?" you ask. It actually sounds fairly biblical, almost Pauline. "I just want to finish the race. I don't want to be disqualified. I want to be found faithful to the end." Which is well and good, *except* if the understanding of faithfulness to the gospel is limited to and concerned only with my allotted three score years and ten, or if by reason of strength, four score.

I don't know about you, but with the challenges and weight of pastoral ministry, sometimes I can be reduced to "Lord, just help *me* to be faithful to the end."

And on the flipside of that temptation is the simple fact that it is very hard to be passionate about, and to maintain passion for, the future, especially if that future is beyond our sight. It is easy for me to be passionate about my children's well-being. And it is easy to extend that passion to their children. But for how many generations out can you maintain that passion? For me it's hard to go much beyond three generations without falling into abstraction.

I share that simply to illustrate that there is a difficulty, even in our understanding of something as good as gospel faithfulness, in holding the future clearly and rightly in our minds. This can contribute to a tendency to define faithfulness to the gospel too much in terms of our own tenure.

Let me state my point positively: *Necessary to our faithful gospel ministry is an investment in the gospel ministry that will come after ours.* I see this laid out in the first two chapters of 2 Timothy.

Disciple Faithful Men

Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:14, "Guard the good deposit entrusted to you." Then, a

few verses later, picking up some of that same language, he tells Timothy, as part of his "guarding," to "entrust to faithful men" what has been entrusted to him, and part of that "entrusting" is teaching them to pass the same thing on to others (2 Timothy 2:2).

Paul is telling Timothy that an essential part of faithful gospel ministry is this investment in the next generation. It is not some optional add-on. In other words, when Paul tells Timothy to "guard" the gospel, he is not just calling Timothy to protect the integrity of the gospel from the effects of false teaching. He is also calling Timothy to fight to preserve the continuation of the gospel against the effects of erosion over time, even beyond Timothy's time.

So let me say it again. *Essential to our faithfulness in gospel ministry is this investment in a succeeding generation of gospel ministers.*

Beware Hezekiah Syndrome

I believe the greatest challenge to this is what we might call the "my lifetime" tendency, a tendency we see exemplified in a certain Old Testament Israelite king. Perhaps you remember the story. Hezekiah is king of Judah. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, comes to attack. Hezekiah, with Isaiah's help, prays and prevails. Hezekiah gets sick and is instructed by Isaiah to get his house in order. Hezekiah cries out to God and is granted fifteen more years. Upon hearing of this, the king of Babylon sends envoys, ostensibly to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery. Hezekiah in his dim-witted pride shows off the national treasures. The envoys return to Babylon. Isaiah asks for a report of their visit. Hezekiah tells Isaiah what he did. In response, Isaiah predicts the coming Babylonian captivity. Then this.

Then said Hezekiah to Isaiah, "The word of the Lord that you have spoken is good." For he thought, "There will be peace and security in *my lifetime*."

What makes this account even more compelling and sobering as a warning to us is the fact that Hezekiah was extremely influential in reforming the spiritual life of Judah: cleansing the temple, restoring temple worship, reinstating Passover, and reorganizing the priesthood. See the account in 2 Chronicles. He made an impressive contribution along very important lines.

But then there is this episode late in his life which betrays both his pride and his myopia. Despite all his zeal, there was, apparently, an absence of zeal for what happened after he passed off the scene.

Avoid Temporal Shortsightedness

Richard Baxter brings a wonderful way of addressing this in his book *The Reformed Pastor*. He writes, “If you will glorify God in your lives, you must be chiefly intent upon the public good, and the spreading of the gospel through the world.” The alternative, according to Baxter, was “a private, narrow soul always taken up about itself that sees not how things go in the world. Its desires and prayers and endeavors go no further than they can see or travel.”

Baxter is talking about the possibility of a geographical shortsightedness, but we might also be guilty of a temporal shortsightedness. That was Hezekiah’s case.

Baxter called his readers to just the opposite—a largeness of soul that “beholds all the earth and desires to know how it goes with the cause and with the servants of the Lord.” Paul’s words in 2 Timothy call us to the very same thing but looking out into the future. “How will it go with the cause? And what can I do to fuel this cause into the future?”

Let us not be content to simply say, “As long as all is well in my lifetime.”

Cultivate Far-Seeing Vision

In contrast to Hezekiah’s myopia, we see Paul’s far-seeing vision, and it becomes especially poignant in view of Paul’s imminent departure. Remember this is the same letter in which he says, “The time of my departure is at hand.”

Paul asks Timothy to think a certain way about gospel ministry. And he asks Timothy to train the next generation to think this way about gospel ministry. And God asks us to think this way about gospel ministry. *Necessary to faithful gospel ministry is an investment in the next generation of gospel ministers.*

This should translate into very concrete realities in our weekly lives. This is a responsibility the church shares corporately, but it will require of you a very definite investment of time, energy and purpose.

Invest in the Next Gospel Generation

What will this look like? Let me suggest four possibilities. First, devote yourself to faithful gospel ministry, especially the ministry of the word. The best way to train men to faithfully preach the gospel is to faithfully preach the gospel.

William Perkins wrote, “So, let every minister both in his teaching and in his conversation work *in such a way* that he honors his calling, *so that* he may attract others to share his love for it.”

Second, pay attention to the young men of various ages in your congregation. Notice how they receive your preaching. Notice how they process your preaching. Notice any deepening affections for God and his word. Keep your eyes open.

Third, create contexts for the young men who catch your eye to practice and grow in their handling of the word.

Fourth, and this must not go unsaid, pray very specifically for God to raise up the next generation of gospel ministers. Pray for your replacement, but pray also for more than that. Pray with an eye, and a heart, toward the future and the continuing success of the gospel in the world, until Christ comes.



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