

THE

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MATTERS

SERIES

DAVE EARLEY

*The Three  
Things  
Every  
Pastor  
Must  
Do*

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# **THE THREE THINGS EVERY PASTOR MUST DO**

**by Dave Earley**

# THE THREE THINGS EVERY PASTOR MUST DO

*The timeworn work of the pastor, such as solid exegetical preaching, prayer and disciple-making, have gone out of style. Bill Hull<sup>1</sup>*

## WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Several years ago, I was tasked with teaching a graduate class for potential pastors titled Pastoral Duties. I examined the syllabus the previous teacher of the course had used and was discouraged to see that it presented a very traditional approach to pastoring a church focusing on things like running meetings, making hospital visits, and doing counseling.

So, I asked a dangerous question: What does the bible say about the primary duties of a pastor?

I started with first discussion of a spiritual shepherding found in the Bible (Moses and Jethro in Exodus 18 and worked my way through. I surprised by three things:

1. The major discussions of pastoral duties in the Bible all described the same three activities.
2. The places in the world where the true church is exploding are the places where pastors do the same three things.
3. The churches I have led all grew and flourished as I focused on three same three things.

## THE THREE THINGS EVERY PASTOR SIMPLY MUST DO

### MOSES AND JETHRO (Exodus 18:14-23)

Moses and the people of God had just experienced the incredible power of God as He delivered them from being the slaves of Egypt. Through the deliberate use of ten miraculous plagues, God had not only struck down the Egyptian's religion, but had shown His great power and His deep compassion for His people.

I feel sorry for Moses. At this point, he was over eighty years old and was stuck in the desert with tens of thousands of irritable and immature people. Instead of sitting back to enjoy retirement, he was looking out for one of the most frustrating mobs ever assembled. The Israelis had spent decades in slavery, so their new liberty quickly turned to license. Every time he turned around, Moses found them either rebelling or griping.

Moses felt the weight of the responsibility and the depth of the frustration of leading the Hebrew nation safely through the wiles of the wilderness into the Promised Land when they would have preferred to return to the familiar bondage of Egypt. Shepherding them was like trying to herd cats.

### The Wrong Approach

Moses was trying to be everyone's pastor, chaplain, counselor, and judge. Jethro, his father-in-law happened to be visiting. Jethro, a veteran shepherd who oversaw massive herds in Midian, noticed how Moses was going about shepherding. He could see that Moses was doing it all wrong.

*When Moses' father-in-law saw everything he was doing for them he asked, "What is this thing you're doing for the people? Why are you alone sitting as judge, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?" **15** Moses replied to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. **16** Whenever they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I make a decision between one man and another. I teach [them] God's statutes and laws." **17** "What you're doing is not good," Moses' father-in-law said to him. **18** "You will certainly wear out both yourself and these people who are with you, because the task is too heavy for you. You can't do it alone. Exodus 18:14-18 HCSB*

Moses knew better than to be the solo-shepherd for the flock of God. God had strategically placed Moses with Jethro for the previous decades in order for Moses to learn the nuances of leading a large flock in difficult terrain. But for some reason, when the people clamored for help, Moses forgot all he had learned and defaulted to trying to meet their needs himself. It was the pathway to burn-out and the prescription for failure. Moses got trapped into wearing himself out doing all sorts of good things and neglecting the very best things that shepherds should do.

### **Avoid the Trap**

The majority of the churches in America are struggling. As many as 85% of the churches in the United States are plateaued or in decline.<sup>2</sup> Most of the struggling churches are led by a solo-pastor who is falling into the same trap that swallowed Moses. Instead of leading a large, healthy, growing flock into the Promised Land, these Lone Ranger pastors are struggling to keep an aging flock of an average of seventy members alive. They are expending all of their energies trying to be everyone's pastor, chaplain, and counselor, all the while missing the three things every pastor simply must do.

Beyond the struggles of the churches, the majority of the pastors in the United States are struggling personally. The trap of the solo-pastor is burning American pastors out. Licensed professional counselor, Michael Todd Wilson, and veteran pastor Brad Hoffman report the following sobering statistics in their book *Preventing Ministry Failure*.

- 90% of American pastors surveyed feel inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands
- 45% say they have experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they needed to take a leave of absence<sup>3</sup>

Every month, as many as 1500 pastors leave the ministry permanently in America. Many more would leave if they could afford it. In a recent survey, over 50% of pastors said they would leave their ministry if they could replace their income.<sup>4</sup>

In their book, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, H.B. London and Neil Wiseman quote startling statistics from research conducted by Fuller Theological Seminary. These statistics are the reflection of the trap of the Lone Ranger pastor.

- 80 percent of pastors say they have insufficient time with spouse and that ministry has a negative effect on their family.
- 40 percent report a serious conflict with a parishioner once a month.
- 75 percent report they've had a significant stress-related crisis at least once in their ministry.
- 45 percent of pastors' wives say the greatest danger to them and family is physical, emotional, mental and spiritual burnout.
- Pastors who work fewer than 50 hours a week are 35 percent more likely to be terminated.
- 40 percent of pastors considered leaving the pastorate in the past three months.
- 25 percent of pastors' wives see their husband's work schedule as a source of conflict.
- 48 percent of pastors think being in ministry is hazardous to family well-being.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, this is not the way God planned it. What is the problem? As we noted above, too many pastors are expending all of their energies trying to be the solo-pastor, chaplain, and counselor and are failing to focus on the three things every pastor simply must do.

### **The Three Things**

God used Jethro to speak into Moses' life. As a wise advisor, he not only told Moses that what he was doing was wrong, but he also took the next step and told Moses what it was that he needed to do to correct it.

*Now listen to me; I will give you some advice, and God be with you. You be the one to represent the people before God and bring their cases to Him. **20** Instruct them about the statutes and laws, and teach them the way to live and what they must do. **21** But you should select from all the people able men, God-fearing, trustworthy, and hating bribes. Place [them] over the people as officials of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. **22** They should judge the people at all times. Then they can bring you every important case but judge every minor case themselves. In this way you will lighten your load, and they will bear [it] with you. **23** If you do this, and God [so] directs you, you will be able to endure, and also all these people will be able to go home satisfied." Exodus 18:19-23*

Jethro's advice is crammed with insight and wisdom. Before we see the requirements let's look at the results. Notice that in verses 22-23 Jethro promised Moses that if he focused on doing the three things every pastor must do, leadership would be less stressful for him and he will be able to endure the strain of shepherding a massive flock. On top of that, the people would prosper as well. That is better than a struggling flock with a burnt-out shepherd.

So, what are the three things every spiritual shepherd simply must do?

1. **Pray** - *be the one to represent the people before God and bring their cases to Him. (vs. 19)*
2. **Teach the people how to live the Word of God** - *Instruct them about the statutes and laws, and teach them the way to live and what they must do. – (vs.20)*
3. **Equip and mentor the next layers of leaders** - *select from all the people able men, God-fearing, trustworthy, and hating bribes. Place [them] over the people as officials of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens (vs.21).*

### **Now is the time!**

Now is the time for us to not let others tell us what we should or should not be doing as pastors. No is the time to let the Word of God be our guide. The very first word from God in the Bible to a pastor was to focus on three things:

1. **Pray**
2. **Teach the Word**
3. **Multiply Leaders**

## JESUS (The Gospels)

I read and re-read the Gospels chronologically about a dozen times. I figured that since Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), He would show us what an effective spiritual shepherd should do. So what did Jesus concentrate on in His ministry? Not attending board meetings, visiting hospitals, or doing counseling.

So, what did Jesus do?

You guessed it. Jesus primarily focused on the same three things Jethro told Moses to do: pray, teach the Word, and lead leaders.

### 1. Pray

Yes, Jesus is God, but do not miss the fact that Jesus Christ was also an amazing man of prayer. S.D. Gordon summarizes the prayer life of the leader Jesus when he writes, “The *man* Christ Jesus *prayed*; prayed *much*; *needed* to pray; *loved* to pray.”<sup>6</sup> He added, “Jesus prayed. He loved to pray...He prayed so much and so often that it became a part of His life. It became to Him like breathing – involuntary.”<sup>7</sup> E. M. Bounds concurs, “Prayer filled the life of our Lord while on earth...Nothing is more conspicuous in the life of our Lord than prayer.”<sup>8</sup>

Yes, I have heard the argument that we cannot pray like He did because He was the Son of God. But that is the point. If Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man, needed to pray, *how much more* do you and I?

In the Gospels there are fifteen accounts of Jesus praying. Eleven are found in Luke’s Gospel. Why? The answer is that of the four Gospel writers, Luke focused most on the *human* aspect of Jesus. Luke wanted us to see that as a *human* leader, Jesus lived a life of prayer. Jesus was fully God *and* fully man. If Jesus, the human, made time to pray, *how much more* do you and I?

### 2. Teach the Word

Jesus was a powerful Biblical preacher. Jesus’ first sermon was quoting the law to Satan (Deut. 8:3; 6:16; 6:13) and skillfully applying it to the situation (Matthew 4:1-11). His second sermon was a dramatic reading of Isaiah 61:1-2 and the proclamation that this Scripture was being fulfilled

as He spoke. As a rabbi He had to thoroughly know the Word of God and teach it.

### **3. Multiply Leaders**

Jesus was the master disciple-maker. Being Jewish, Jesus followed a rabbinical model of disciple development. He selected and called a young men to be with Him for training in ministry (Mark 1:16-20; 3:12-19). The climax of His ministry to them was His commissioning of them to also be disciple-makers (Matthew 28:18-20). He developed His leaders to such an extent that they were able to not only carry on the ministry, but multiply it and take it to the world after He left.

### **Now is the time!**

Now is the time for us to not let others tell us what we should or should not be doing as pastors. Now is the time to let the Jesus, the Good Shepherd be our guide. The example of Jesus was to focus on doing three things:

- 1. Pray**
- 2. Teach the Word**
- 3. Multiply Leaders**

## THE APOSTLES (Acts 6:1-7)

The Apostles were personally trained by Jesus to be effective spiritual shepherds. So, what did they do?

As you know, they started the church in Jerusalem with huge success – 3,000 people baptized the first day and others saved daily (Acts 2:41-47). This amazing growth led to inevitable growing pains. Soon the apostles found themselves getting sucked into the trap of doing the ministry themselves and neglecting the three things pastors simply must do. This was not good for them and it was leaving some of the flock to be neglected.

Wisely they called for an adjustment in priorities. They returned to the three things: prayer, teaching the Word, and developing and deploying other leaders.

*Then the Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, "It would not be right for us to give up preaching about God to wait on tables. **3** Therefore, brothers, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty. **4** But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the preaching ministry." - Acts 6:2-4*

They choose to follow the same advice that Jethro had given Moses. They asked the church to help them to concentrate their energies on the things every spiritual shepherd simply must do.

1. **Pray** - *we will devote ourselves to prayer*
2. **Teach the Word of God** - *It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God... we will devote ourselves to ... the ministry of the word.*
3. **Multiply leaders** – *Pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty*

How did it work? The good news is that the church agreed and supported them. As a result, God was able to richly bless them and multiply the church.

*The proposal pleased the whole company. So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte from Antioch. 6 They had them stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. 7 So the preaching about God flourished, the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith. - Acts 6:5-7*

### **Now is the time!**

Now is the time for us to not let others tell us what we should or should not be doing as pastors. Now is the time to let the first church in history be our guide. The example of the very first church in history, a church that reached its city and changed the world, was that the pastors were to focus on doing three things:

- 1. Pray**
- 2. Teach the Word**
- 3. Multiply Leaders**

## **PAUL AND TIMOTHY**

### **(1 TIMOTHY 2:1-8; 2 TIMOTHY 3:15- 4:2; 2 TIMOTHY 2:2)**

Paul was the mentor of several young pastors including Timothy. We are fortunate to have several of the letters Paul gave Timothy detailing how he was to fulfill his spiritual shepherding responsibilities. Like Jesus and the Apostles, there is no mention of many of the responsibilities assumed to be essential for the traditional American pastor. Paul says nothing about committee meetings, hospital visitation, or performing funeral services.

Instead, just like we saw from Jethro and Moses, Jesus, and the Apostles, Paul encouraged Timothy to focus on three essential tasks: Pray, Teach the Word, and Lead Leaders.

#### **1. Pray**

Paul intentionally reminded Timothy of the importance of prayer. He advised Timothy that as the spiritual shepherd for the church at Ephesus, one task was priority one – prayer.

*First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone... 1Timothy 2:1*

#### **2. Teach the Word**

Through-out his letters to Timothy, Paul reminds him of the importance of sound teaching. Paul commanded Timothy to “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles “the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). He further charged him to “Preach the word (2 Timothy 4:2).

#### **3. Multiply Leaders**

Paul had modeled the importance of mentoring rising leaders to Timothy when he took Timothy under his wing during his church planting trips. In his letters, Paul told Timothy that one of his primary responsibilities was to also train faithful men who would be able to disciple others.

*And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2:2*

Beyond that, Paul told Timothy's congregation, the Ephesians, that Timothy and the other pastor-teachers that might have been in their church were Christ's gift to the church (Ephesians 4:11). He also said that the responsibility of those pastors was to equip each member to do the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:12). Doing so results in the growth of the members *and* the increase of the body.

*11 And He personally gave ... some pastors and teachers, 12 for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, ... From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part. - Ephesians 4:11-12, 16*

### **Now is the time!**

Now is the time for us to not let others tell us what we should or should not be doing as pastors. Now is the time to let the first church in history be our guide. The example of the very first church in history, a church that reached its city and changed the world, was that the pastors were to focus on doing three things:

- 1. Pray**
- 2. Teach the Word**
- 3. Multiply Leaders**

## DAVE

I started a parachute church plant with some friends in my basement when I was twenty-six years old. For the next five years, I worked eighty hours a week leading that church. Within five years, the church had grown to 350 people worshipping every week. We had fought through city zoning boards, purchased land, and built a building of our own where we worshipped.

At that same time, my wife and I had three young children. My extended family had some very difficult issues. Then I got sick...very, very sick.

I only weighed 130 pounds to begin with, but lost eighteen additional pounds in three weeks. My immune system crashed. I had a sinus infection that I could not get rid of. I became allergic to almost everything. My blood sugar plummeted. My joints and muscles ached so bad I could hardly move. I was exhausted, completely exhausted all of the time.

My illness lasted three years. Some days I could not even get out of bed on my own. Some days I was too weak to even roll on my own.

I could not do many of the things most pastors do. I could not visit the hospital. I could not attend a lot of meetings. I stopped doing counseling. I trained others to do weddings and funerals. I delegated administration to others.

I had no other choice but to stop doing all the *good* things I was doing and focus solely on the *best* things.

So, I only did three things. I could only do three things.

I studied the Bible during the week and preached three times every Sunday.

I prayed for a half-an-hour every morning with a disciple and an hour after that on my own. I also led an all-night prayer meeting once a month.

I disciplined one group of men for two hours a week and met with another group of young Christians one night a week.

I only did those three things.

And my church grew.

During those three years of illness, my church grew to over 500 people a week.

I slowly got back to working fifty hours a week. But I focused most of my energy and effort on the three things. *Pray, Teach the Word* and *Multiply Disciples*. I began to put more time in prayer and especially in training small group leaders. My church grew to 2,000 people a week and 125 small groups for adults and teens. Sixty-five to seventy per cent of our members did ministry every week. We started five new churches. We baptized over 100 people a year.

## **Warning!**

I understand the importance of some of the traditional responsibilities of an American pastor such as weddings, funerals, counseling, visitation, etc. I understand the need to create plans, make calendars and prepare budgets.

But in too many cases, for far too long, we have over-emphasized the *good* things to the neglect of the *best*. In order to be as biblical as possible, the rest of this book will focus on inspiring and instructing pastors in the three tasks every effective spiritual shepherd simply must do: *Pray, Teach the Word* and *Lead*.

## **Now WHAT?**

I suggest that a pastor spends at least 25% of his time investing in prayer, 25% in studying and teaching the Word, 25% equipping saints and developing leaders and 25% of his time to other pastoral duties. This means in a 60 hour work week, he's spending 15 hours praying with and for people, 15 hours studying and teaching, 15 hours developing potential multipliers and 15 hours doing other things.

## QUESTIONS:

1. How much time you currently spend each week praying and developing the prayer culture in your church?
2. How much time you currently spend each week, developing leaders?
3. What will you do to do to apply this chapter in your life and ministry?

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For More Information on this subject check out

- *Pastoral Leadership Is....*
- *Prayer: Timeless Secret of High-Impact Leaders*
- *Disciple Making Is...*

## Notes

1. Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor*, Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming Revell, 1988) 41
2. Win Arn, *The Pastor's Manual for Effective Ministry*, (Monrovia, CA: Church Growth, 1988), 41, 43.
3. Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffman, *Preventing Ministry Failure*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 31
4. *Focus on the Family*, 1998 as quoted by Ken Sande of Peacemaker Ministries in an article entitled article, "Strike the Shepherd", <http://www.peacemaker.net/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=aqKFLTOB|pH&b=1084263&ct=1245867> (accessed April 1, 2011)
5. *"Pastors At Greater Risk"* by H.B London Jr. and Neil Wiseman, Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2003 p33-60
6. S.D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Prayer*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 211
7. S.D. Gordon, 209
8. E. M. Bounds, *The Reality of Prayer*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 69, 73

