

Philosophy of Ministry

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Philosophy of Shepherding

Throughout both Testaments in Scripture, the image of God being the Shepherd of His people is repeated and well-known (Psalm 23, John 10). However, God also calls for human shepherds to servant lead His people in His church (1 Peter 5:2).

To me the key idea of leadership as a shepherd is to take part in servant leadership. Too often in our world today—and even in our churches—the focus is always on ourselves and our gain. To truly lead in a God-honoring method as a shepherd is to lead as a servant. The call presented in Scripture is to be a willing, eager servant for the body of Christ. This is a servant who will put the needs of His flock above his own interests, gain, popularity, or advancement. The corporate world has a triangular model where the President/CEO is at the top and all others serve him/her and his/her vision for the company. The church model prescribed in Scripture is that of an upside down triangle, with the shepherd or shepherds serving their flock through love and humility while providing them a vision for ministry.

In 1 Timothy 3 and Titus we have the qualifications given for shepherds who desire to serve in God's church. These lists are a constant check point for me—as is all of Scripture—and I do my best to uphold them with God's gracious help. That said, I think a key component of being a shepherd is authenticity, and at no point will I attempt to hide my struggles or imperfection in an effort to act perfect or above selfish foolishness. The shepherd is no different than the flock, in the manner that we all need the grace and forgiveness offered by OUR Shepherd for the many times we fail Him in our sin.

It is clear to me that God has called me to be a Shepherd of His church. Through the giftedness and desires He has so clearly implanted in me, it is with great wonder, awe, and excitement that I look forward to fulfilling this call on my life with Him as my constant source of strength and wisdom.

Philosophy of Worship

My philosophy of worship is both simple and complex. The simplistic nature of it is that it can be wrapped up in a single verse from John 4, where Jesus says, "*Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth.*"

Worship is a powerful, sustaining experience that can take many shapes and forms, be experienced in different contexts and in different cultures, but can only be truly worship if done in the Spirit and in truth. Simply put, worship happens when God is invited in and the object of our worship is the One, True God.

In the Old Testament, the Israelites had designated places to go to in which they would enter the presence of God and could therefore worship. Though our church buildings hold worship services, we in the age of grace have no such limitations. Since God is everywhere and His Spirit is indwelt in His followers, worship can happen anywhere at any time. The only limitation is ourselves.

We are, however, called to assemble together in His presence—and faithfully (Hebrews 10: 25). My philosophy of corporate worship is no different than my philosophy for all worship—it must be done

in the Spirit and in truth. The historical function of the church has been to provide a place for corporate worship, the reading and preaching of the Word of God, and carrying out the sacraments. All of these are core foundations of the church and must be done in some manner for the body to function as prescribed in Scripture.

Outside of that, I place hardly any limitations on corporate worship. In the Spirit and in truth...and as long as it is that, anything goes. In Psalm 96 we are told to sing to the Lord a new song, and I take that call very seriously. I strive to have worship services be real, raw, and relevant to the culture and society that we claim to be ministering to. I have no issues with old music or ministry methods, but do take issue with anyone who tries to block certain types of music or new ministry ideas from a worship service. If the message, the music, and the worship is in the Spirit and in truth, then I am prepared to use any and all avenues to get the gospel news out to the culture God has placed me in.

Philosophy of Prayer

"Apart from me, you can do nothing," Jesus said to His disciples in John 15. It is a bold, humbling, and honest statement that is never far from my mind. I know that in order for any ministry, any evangelistic method, any sermon, any effort on my part to make an eternal difference, God has to come alongside it and work through it. Knowing this, my life and my ministry need prayer.

1 Thessalonians 5 tells us to pray without ceasing, and at first I thought this to be impossible. However, as I have grown in Christ I understand prayer much in the same way I do worship. There are literally no limitations put on prayer by God. Prayer can be words spoken aloud or in silence, it can be promptings, it can be singing, it can be thoughts; it can even be tears or groans. Prayer can be questions, or just plain conversation. The point of prayer is relationship. God is inviting us into a dynamic, life-changing relationship with Him, and relationship requires communication. Prayer is more than just sitting down with a list and presenting requests to God; it is having an active, daily, unbroken conversation with our Father. It is a conversation in which we can talk about the needs of others, share confession, receive grace, prepare for an upcoming mission or challenge, and much more. As a shepherd, for my ministry to survive and flourish, it will require a daily conversation between me and my Father, for my needs and the needs of my flock.

Philosophy of Church

As I have gotten older, I have seen time and time again the failures of the church. The selfishness, pride, hypocrisy, and judgmental attitudes can be a lot to deal with, even for a follower of Christ. However, it is my unwavering belief that the local church is the hope of the world.

Church will always have problems, yes, but that is because it is filled with humans. We are one in our brokenness and sinfulness. However, our greatest weakness points to our greatest strength. For just as we are one in our sinfulness, we are one in forgiveness. The church—God's body—has been given the message that can *literally change the world*. We know that we have fallen short, we know there is nothing in our power that can cause us to live up to God's standards, but we also know the way to life, forgiveness, grace, and love.

To properly get this message out, the body needs to work in unity. 1 Corinthians 12 talks about the need for unity among members of the body, as well as pointing to the truth that each member has been given certain gifts and abilities to serve the body with. As a shepherd, part of my role will be to

serve in the areas that God has gifted me, as well as placing people in ministries and activities in which their giftedness is used to the glory of God.

Ministry Values:

Foundation of Prayer

As mentioned above, I can do nothing apart from God. Therefore I am convinced that no success, victory, or gain achieved in ministry is accomplished without God's blessing. In light of this, I need to set apart times for prayer by myself, with other leaders, with my family, and with the church. Every service I take part in, every meeting I attend, and every teaching I give must be coated in prayer.

Preaching the Word

There is no other honor I take more seriously or find more joy in the preaching out of God's Word. I understand the stakes at hand, and instead of cowering in fear of them, they drive me. It is vitally important for me to commit every message to prayer, so that the ideas presented come from God alone—and never from me. It is important for me to construct messages that fit into the model of worship—in the Spirit and in truth. I believe that in sermons, truth can never be watered down or changed to tickle the ears of the hearers. In addition, it must also be presented in a manner and in a language that all can clearly understand the message being presented. I will use current cultural benchmarks and references, and strive to use illustrations in the ways that Christ did. I take preaching very seriously, and therefore require time to prepare messages in an effort to ensure they are real, raw, relevant, and truthful. I strive to end before the audience is ready for me to end, and to present a clear calling every time I have the privilege of an audience. I believe that the sermon is the most powerful moment of a service, and it is my constant prayer that when I have the privilege to speak on His behalf, that God would simply shove me out of the way and take control.

Ministry of Presence

Throughout history, every culture has found ways to support and encourage each other through difficult times. However, it was in hearing about an old Jewish practice that I was struck by the power of presence. Back in Biblical times, whenever someone experienced the death of a loved one, one of the ways their closest friends and family members would show their support is through the ministry of presence. Instead of worrying about the right thing to say or getting flowers, they would literally come and sit with the grieving person. Sometimes no words were spoken at all, they would just be there.

For me, my most successful ministry practices are preaching and presence. And presence takes many shapes. The most common or recognized is being alongside someone during a hardship (loss of a loved one, stay in a hospital, etc.). In addition to those widely recognized practices of presence in modern ministry, I have found that ministry is most effective once relationships are built, and therefore I strive to be present in others' lives.

When it comes to personal evangelism, I have found that building relationships is far more effective than passing out tracts or engaging in confrontations without any prior relationship. In ministry, I will set aside time to spend with non-Christians every single week. I will eat lunch/dinner with them, have them to my house, play sports with them, go to their homes...just be present. And in

the midst of those relationships, I will look for opportunities to share my faith. I have found that God opens those doors when you are willing.

When it comes to discipleship, I believe the same standards apply for the most effectiveness. I have seen real growth in people that I took the time to have a relationship with first, and then sought to help bring them along in their faith with challenging questions, conversations, and authenticity. To truly be a mentor and bring about discipleship for those I serve, they must know me and know that I genuinely care about them. Once that is in place, they are more likely to heed my encouragements open themselves up to God, who is the only one who can change us.

All of this means that I will take time in ministry to be with people where they are. Restaurants, gyms, golf courses (oh, the stories I could tell from the golf course), and yes, even coffee shops—though I don't drink coffee or tea—will be places I will spend my time with others, getting to know them, and hopefully encouraging them through my presence.

Humanity

I recognize that as a shepherd and a teacher, there are calls in the Bible for me to be a leader and an example. I humbly seek to fulfill those always. I forever keep in mind, however, my humanity and weakness. I recognize my propensity for sin, and instead of hiding it, I remind myself constantly of it (Psalm 51) to lean more and more on the grace of Jesus for forgiveness, repentance, and the strength to withstand temptations. I need Christ—completely—and His Spirit's guidance to save me from my own wretchedness. I will be honest in ministry that I am no different from anyone I am trying to serve: I am selfish, prideful, dishonest, and vain. It is only through Christ that I ever overcome my sinfulness and it is a testament to His glory that He still uses me in spite of my brokenness.

My Most Important Role

As a shepherd, I am also called to be a husband and a father. 1 Timothy gives preference to this call, and Scripture speaks clearly of how important a role this is in my life. Practical application of this call means that I will be present in the lives of my wife and child(ren). The time spent with them must be often, and lengthy. I will be at the dinner table whenever possible; I will tuck them into bed and spend quality time with my wife. I will be with them on my days off. They need me more than anyone else, and as a pastor I will schedule my days and weeks in ways that prioritize them.

Overall Vision Statement:

My overall mission/vision for ministry is simply this: To be used how God would choose to use me. I believe He has gifted me, prepared me, and called me for ministry. Daily I will seek His guidance, direction, and blessing on how He wants me to serve and proceed.