

Should I Expect to Be Pastored?

By Steve Burchett



I attended a conference years ago and stayed in the home of some local church members. The church hosting the conference had grown extremely large, with Sunday attendance in the thousands. The family I stayed with spoke of former days when their main teaching pastor wasn't so well-known. They longed for those years when the church was much smaller and said, "You could really know the elders back then."

It's not just large churches that have pastors who don't really shepherd their people. Some

churches aren't even close to triple digits in attendance, yet their members are barely pastored. I was once invited to teach the Bible at a church. While speaking at a morning event that included the church's sole pastor and perhaps 25 church members, I noticed something strange. The pastor was fixated on several sheets of paper he was carrying. I inquired what he was looking at, and was told it was his sermon notes for his next message (which was over a week away!). I was then told, "This is how he always is, wherever he goes. He's always reading or studying his notes and never really engages people."

How sad. And how unbiblical! Christ's design for his followers is to be carefully and thoughtfully pastored. That's why Paul charged the Ephesian elders, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for [to shepherd/pastor] the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Paul used common biblical imagery to communicate that the church is like a flock of sheep and the elders are their shepherds who are responsible to lead, feed, and protect them (especially from "fierce wolves" [v. 29] — false teachers who would seek to destroy them).

Should you expect to be pastored? Absolutely. By whom? By the elders over your particular flock — your local church.

Is it possible, though, that this shepherding responsibility is only for the difficult sheep, or the more impressive sheep who exhibit great potential? Not at all. Elders are to pastor "all the flock." This does not rule out the fact that some people will be difficult (try not to be!) and will need more care. Others will exhibit such character and skills that the leadership may invest more time with them, particularly if they are men who could become leaders. Yet, every sheep counts, every believer is gifted, and, to shift metaphors, every part is critical to "make the body grow" (Ephesians 4:16). Writing to the Ephesians several years beyond Acts 20, Paul reminded them that pastors are gifts from the ascended Christ to the church "to equip the saints" — each believer under their care — "for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (v. 12).

If you are in a church with a pastor or pastors who have embraced the Lord's design for shepherding church members, thank the Holy Spirit for giving you faithful overseers. But what if you are not? Here are a few suggestions.

First, make sure *you* are not part of the problem. Are you faithful to attend the main weekly gathering? Do you ever arrive early and linger afterward, not only to interact with other members, but also with the leaders? And do you participate in other meetings during the week where you can be around the pastor(s)? It's unfair to blame leaders for failed pastoring if you are not doing your part to get to know them.

Second, express gratitude in specific ways to your pastor(s). Even if elders are failing to pastor well, they are likely doing something that you can appreciate. Perhaps one of the leaders prayed in a helpful way at the Sunday meeting. Thank him before leaving. Or if the message was biblically strong, and the Lord spoke to you through it, talk to that pastor and tell him specifically what you appreciated. I'm not guaranteeing this will improve their shepherding skills, but sometimes better relationships between pastors and their flocks are spurred on by happy, eager church members.

Third, avoid speaking unkindly about your pastor(s) to others. You are free to talk with a trustworthy fellow church member about his or her assessment of the shepherding that's happening at the church. But beware! A conversation like that is difficult to have without it turning into a complaining session. As long as you remain in your church, the Lord's will is to "esteem [your leaders] very highly in love because of their work" (1 Thessalonians 5:13).

Fourth, ask your leaders what their plan is for shepherding the church members. They might have a strategy that they are about to implement. They might not. Your question could get them thinking in better categories. If they answer with something deficient like, "We really think people are pastored through the sermons," be careful how you respond. They are not totally wrong. As mentioned above, express appreciation, but don't be afraid to press him (or them) to consider additional ways of pastoring that Jesus would desire in a local church. Avoid speaking in a frustrated tone, as it will likely have the opposite effect of what you desire. Be respectful. These men need to feel the weightiness of shepherding God's church, "which he purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

Fifth, pray for your pastor(s). Perhaps you only have one pastor, and he has another job besides his ministry for the church. He's limited and weak, and he knows it. Pray not only for him, but that God would raise up fellow elders to shepherd alongside him. Or it could be that you are in a large church with multiple elders. The ratio of elders to members might be such that it's difficult, if not impossible, for those men to fulfill Paul's admonition in Acts 20:28. Hopefully, they are aware of that and are trying to make some change to recover Christ's will for the church. They need your prayers.