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HOW PASTORS DEVELOP SPIRITUAL SHEPHERDS
FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

By

DAVID HARDING

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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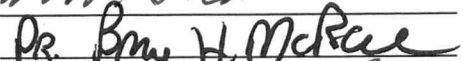
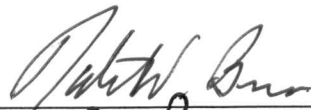
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ABSTRACT

Leadership development in the local church is one of the primary responsibilities of pastors, and yet one of their greatest challenges. The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors develop leaders as spiritual shepherds for the local church. This study utilized a qualitative research design, in which seven pastors were interviewed based on a semi-structured interview format. The review of the literature and analysis of the seven interviews revealed that developing spiritual shepherds is a long-term process of helping people discern God's calling to this role, and helping them develop the competencies and character required. This study concluded that developing spiritual shepherds requires a strong relational investment on the part of the pastor, along with a commitment to using the ordinary means of grace, and relying upon the help of the congregation.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

“A church without godly leaders is an endangered church. And a church that does not train leaders is an unfaithful church. God gives leaders to his churches for the maturity, unity, and soundness of each local congregation. Without godly, faithful, replicating leadership, churches suffer deeply.”¹ These sobering words introduce Thabiti Anyabwile’s book, *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons*. According to Anyabwile, the church rises and falls on faithful spiritual leaders who are called and gifted by God. According to Harry Reeder, pastor of Briarwood Presbyterian Church, “The American church is standing at the brink of a self-inflicted death spiral accelerated by worldly leadership.”² George Barna has come to the conclusion that “the American church is dying due to a lack of strong leadership.”³ Reeder and Gragg believe this is largely because the American church has adopted a model of leadership from corporate America. “But the church is not a business. We do not produce a product to be bought; members are not customers. Pastors are not CEOs, and leaders are not a board of directors.”⁴

Pastors are shepherds of God’s sheep. The English word for “pastor” comes from a Latin word which means “shepherd.” In *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective*

¹ Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2012), 11.

² Harry L. Reeder and Rod Gragg, *The Leadership Dynamic: A Biblical Model for Raising Effective Leaders* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 12.

³ George Barna, *Leaders on Leadership: Wisdom, Advice, and Encouragement on the Art of Leading God's People*, The Leading Edge Series (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1997), 18.

⁴ Reeder and Gragg, 15.

Shepherding in Your Church, Westminster Theological Seminary professor Timothy

Witmer wrote,

The metaphor of shepherding is used in the Bible to describe the care which God provides for His people. This is clearly seen in Psalm 23, where the Lord's care for His people leads to the superlative expression of gratitude and praise from His people, 'I shall not want.' Nothing is lacking in the care provided for the flock. Not only does he feed them, but he also leads them and protects them.⁵

The Apostle Peter makes use of shepherding imagery when he urges the elders of the church to follow their Chief Shepherd in caring for the members of the church. Peter writes,

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.⁶

When he calls the Ephesian elders to meet him at Miletus, Paul exhorts them, saying, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."⁷ The phrase translated as "to care for" is one word in the Greek text, and means "to shepherd." Paul was telling these leaders that their function in the church was that of spiritual shepherds who were to keep watch over their own souls, as well as the souls of the believers in their fellowship.

⁵ Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2010), 13.

⁶ 1 Peter 5:1-4.

⁷ Acts 20:28.

Throughout the scriptures, we find the shepherding metaphor is one of the best descriptors of the nature of spiritual leadership in the local church. As Tim Witmer notes, “The fundamental responsibility of church leaders is to shepherd God’s flock.”⁸ He goes on to explain that the work of shepherding entails knowing, leading, teaching, protecting, and disciplining God’s sheep. This work is to be done by a plurality or team of elders, not just one. As Witmer explains, “Shepherding is not merely the responsibility of those who are called to be pastors but also of those who are called to be elders or its equivalent in our churches. In fact, “shepherding” is at the very heart of the biblical picture of leadership. Unfortunately, this emphasis is missing in many churches.”⁹

He notes that many pastors feel overwhelmed by the fact that they seem to be the only ones doing the work of shepherding. In far too many churches, it falls upon the pastor to do all the visiting and counseling among the members. Perhaps this is because the pastor is the one receiving the paycheck. Witmer cautions,

We look at the plethora of reports that come out year after year about pastoral burnout and the alarming number of clergy leaving their churches or leaving the ministry altogether. Might not one of the contributing factors be that they are not receiving the help they need in shepherding the flock prescribed in the Scriptures? Not only will our churches be healthier, but the work of the pastor will also be more manageable if all the elders take seriously the work that Christ has called them to do in sharing the responsibility to shepherd the flock.¹⁰

Christ has gifted his Church with multiple leaders who will see that she is cared for according to his Word. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul teaches that Christ gave the church pastors and teachers “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”¹¹ The Lord of the church intends for pastors to train his

⁸ Witmer, 2.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 43-44.

¹¹ Ephesians 4:11-13.

people, so that they will be able to do the ministry God has called them to do. This is the shepherd's job description. However, in his book *The Disciple Making Pastor*, Bill Hull contends that many Christians are not well trained, "largely because pastors have not worked out a means of helping people do what He [Jesus] has told them they should."¹² The result, he says, is that many Christians feel frustrated and guilty that they aren't doing more in service to Christ's church.

If the church is to develop spiritual shepherds who will faithfully lead God's people, pastors must see this as one of their top priorities, alongside the ministry of the Word and prayer. Paul counsels Timothy in this regard with these words from 2 Timothy 2:2, "and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."¹³ Harry Reeder asserts,

The Word of God is not silent on leadership or how to develop and deploy leaders. God's Word is clear, and we must embrace the biblical vision, reclaiming the church as a leadership factory and distribution center by prioritizing the disciple-making task of defining, developing, and deploying Christian leaders in the American church.¹⁴

According to Henry and Richard Blackaby, in their book *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda*, "Although the leadership shortage is universally acknowledged, there is little consensus on how to discover and develop leaders."¹⁵ Harry Reeder agrees, and offers a strategy to correct the problem.

Instead of following the whims of the world and the spirit of the world, we must intentionally pursue a strategic commitment to three initiatives drawn from the timeless truths of God's Word and verified throughout history. First, we must clearly define biblical leadership; second, we must develop godly leaders; and

¹² Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor* (Old Tappan, NJ: F.H. Revell, 1988), 20.

¹³ 2 Timothy 2:2.

¹⁴ Reeder and Gragg, 18.

¹⁵ Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 9.

third, we must strategically deploy those leaders in the church and around the world.

The development of godly leaders who will be shepherds of God's people is one of the primary responsibilities of pastors. Yet, many pastors feel ill-equipped for this particular task.

The Purpose and Research Questions of this Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors develop leaders as spiritual shepherds for the local church. The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. How do pastors help those they lead discern their calling as spiritual shepherds?
2. How do pastors help people develop the character required of spiritual shepherds?
3. How do pastors help people develop the competencies required of spiritual shepherds?

Significance of the Study

This study will have significance for anyone engaged in the work of developing leaders for the local church, especially pastors. This study will also benefit those who are currently preparing to enter the pastoral ministry, giving them useful information that can be put into practice upon their first pastoral charge. It will also prove helpful for congregations that currently lack the kind of spiritual leadership required by the scriptures. Harry Reeder and Rod Gragg offer hope and encouragement to church leaders who may be discouraged by the lack of spiritual leadership among the laity. They write, "Existing leaders who have a passion for faithful and effective genuine biblical leadership can transform their congregations into leadership factories and distribution centers."¹⁶ The authors contend that when the church is led by divinely called, spiritually qualified,

¹⁶ Reeder and Gragg, 19.

competent shepherds, “the response will be a renewal of authentic unity—a unity based on the inspired Word of God, a unity in one Lord, one faith, one baptism. And this renewal of unity will also encourage a harmonious diversity of callings, passions, gifts, and abilities within the body of Christ.”¹⁷ It is the hope of the researcher that this study will serve these goals as more and more leaders are developed as spiritual shepherds of Christ’s church.

Definition of Terms

Spiritual Shepherd – The imagery of shepherding is the dominant metaphor used in scripture to describe spiritual leadership. For the purposes of this study, the term “spiritual shepherd” is used to refer to non-vocational laypersons called and gifted to serve in the biblical office of elder in a local church.

Shepherding – Shepherding refers to the functions of the spiritual shepherd, which include knowing, leading, teaching, protecting, and disciplining God’s sheep.

Calling – For the purposes of this study, “calling” is defined as the sense of God’s leading in a person’s life to become a spiritual shepherd.

Character – This term refers to the spiritual maturity required of spiritual shepherds.

Competency – This term refers to the ministry skills required of spiritual shepherds.

Pastor – For the purposes of this study, the title “pastor” refers to those called to vocational ministry in the local church, as differentiated from those called as non-vocational elders/spiritual shepherds.

¹⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors develop people as spiritual shepherds who will lead their congregations toward greater maturity in Christ. In order to understand how pastors do this work, the following areas of literature will be reviewed: biblical literature, the calling of spiritual shepherds, the competencies of spiritual shepherds, the character of spiritual shepherds, and the educational process of training spiritual shepherds.

Biblical/Theological Literature

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the imagery of God as the shepherd of his people is rich and plentiful. It begins in Genesis 48:15 where the patriarch Jacob blesses his son Joseph and describes Yahweh as “The God before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day.”¹⁸ Jacob is reminding Joseph of God’s faithful covenant love throughout Jacob’s tumultuous life. This image of God as a faithful shepherd is also captured in the book of the prophet Isaiah when he writes, “He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.”¹⁹ In one of the Bible’s best known passages, the twenty-third psalm, King David affirms, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”²⁰ As Tim Witmer notes, “The Lord is the ultimate provider, protector, and guide for his sheep.”²¹

¹⁸ Genesis 48:12.

¹⁹ Isaiah 40:11.

²⁰ Psalm 23:1.

²¹ Witmer, 12.

The psalmists rejoice in God's faithful, shepherding care of his flock: "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand."²² Elsewhere the psalmist urges, "Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture."²³ God intends for his people to know and relate to him as their personal shepherd, the one who created them, who will care for and protect them, and who is worthy of their joyful worship and obedience. Tim Witmer argues that God's revelation of himself as a shepherd is intended to create in his people a deep and pervasive dependence on his sovereign care for them.

The Lord's self-revelation as "shepherd" of his people is not merely a metaphor with which his people could clearly relate, but it is one that describes the comprehensive care that he provides for his people. The imagery of shepherd-sheep captures the comprehensive sovereignty of the shepherd over the sheep and the need of the sheep to yield completely to his care.²⁴

Just as the Bible uses the imagery of shepherding to describe God's care for his people, it also uses shepherding imagery to refer to those the Lord calls to lead his people. In Isaiah 63:11, Moses is referred to as a shepherd of Israel who led God's people out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. "Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit."²⁵ David's role as king of Israel is described as a shepherding ministry. Recalling the days of David's leadership,

²² Psalm 95:6-7.

²³ Psalm 100:1-3.

²⁴ Witmer, 13.

²⁵ Isaiah 63:11.

the psalmist says that “God chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the nursing ewes he brought him to shepherd Jacob his people, Israel his inheritance. With upright heart he shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand.”²⁶

Not only Moses and David, but all of Israel’s leaders are described as shepherds. Unfortunately, most of them were unfaithful in their divine calling to lead and feed God’s people.

They fed themselves rather than the flock; they failed to strengthen the sickly, heal the diseased, bind up the broken, and seek the lost. The result for the people was that they were scattered, literally to a foreign land, and became food for every beast of the field. They failed to fulfill the most basic functions of shepherds: to feed, lead, and protect the sheep.²⁷

Through the prophet, Isaiah, God declares “His watchmen are blind; they are all without knowledge; they are all silent dogs; they cannot bark, dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber. The dogs have a mighty appetite; they never have enough. But they are shepherds who have no understanding.”²⁸ In light of this failure, God promised that he himself would come and be the faithful shepherd for his people, “Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.”²⁹

The image of shepherding is carried over into the New Testament where Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd. “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my

²⁶ Psalm 78:72.

²⁷ Witmer, 21.

²⁸ Isaiah 56:10-11.

²⁹ Isaiah 40:10-11.

life for the sheep.”³⁰ Jesus claims that he is the shepherd of whom the prophets spoke. He has come to tend and gather and carry and lead his sheep. Therefore, Jesus makes clear that those who serve as the leaders of his people should serve with humility. Wanting to emphasize that his shepherds would be servants of the sheep rather than harsh taskmasters, Jesus said to his disciples,

You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.³¹

Not only are the shepherds to serve with humility, like the Good Shepherd, but they are also charged with giving oversight and protection to God’s flock. The apostle Peter solemnly charges the elders of the church to “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”³² The apostle Paul urges the Ephesian elders to be faithful shepherds when he says, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”³³ Both Peter and Paul emphasize the high stakes involved in leading God’s people. The elders must faithfully lead and feed God’s sheep as spiritual shepherds because they are God’s blood-bought flock.

³⁰ John 10:14-15.

³¹ Mark 10:42-45.

³² 1 Peter 5:2-3.

³³ Acts 20:28.

The task of spiritual shepherding requires a calling to that work, along with particular character qualities and competencies. These areas, which must be developed in the shepherd's life, are the focus of the next area of literature review.

The Calling of Spiritual Shepherds

According to many evangelical authors on church leadership, spiritual leaders must first be called by God. J. Oswald Sanders, former consulting director of Overseas Missionary Fellowship, contends that

Spiritual leaders are not elected, appointed, or created by synods or churchly assemblies. God alone makes them. One does not become a spiritual leader by merely filling an office, taking course work in the subject, or resolving in one's own will to do this task. A person must qualify to be a spiritual leader.³⁴

Sanders' assertion agrees with what Paul tells the Ephesian elders when he writes, "The Holy Spirit has made you overseers."³⁵ In Ephesians 4:11, Paul says it is Christ who gives leaders to the church as gifts. Lawrence Eyers concurs, arguing that "God makes men elders, and the church's duty is to discern which men God has given to the church for teaching and ruling."³⁶ Again, Sanders asserts, "When God's searching eye finds a person qualified to lead, God anoints that person with the Holy Spirit and calls him or her to a special ministry."³⁷

This anointing process can be seen throughout the scriptures, especially when God chooses David as king of Israel. Through the prophet Samuel, God says to king Saul, "But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you

³⁴ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, Commitment to Spiritual Growth Series (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1994), 18.

³⁵ Acts 20:28.

³⁶ Lawrence R. Eyres, *The Elders of the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1975), 7.

³⁷ Sanders, 19.

have not kept what the LORD commanded you.”³⁸ It is God who ultimately determines who will shepherd his people. In light of this, Harry Reeder and Rod Gragg say it is evident that

The first requirement for leadership in God’s church is the existence of a divine call. This means that the leader seeks the position, the position does not seek the leader. God moves in the hearts of potential leaders to equip them with a God-given passion to lead and a selfless sense of calling to be a leader.³⁹

This God-given passion to lead is a divine calling to be a spiritual shepherd, and is one of the first indicators to be discerned in a potential shepherd’s life.

The calling to be a spiritual shepherd is to be distinguished from other “callings” in the Bible. For example, in Acts 17:30, God calls all people everywhere to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus himself openly calls all people to come to him for salvation. He declares, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”⁴⁰ There is a universal, general calling of God made to all people. This is the free offer of the gospel to all without distinction.

Yet, there is also a calling that is effectual only to those whom God has chosen for salvation. This particular call of God not only commands people to repent and believe the gospel, but it enables and persuades them to do it willingly and gladly. James Boice, the late pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, wrote, “In theology the call of God is usually termed an ‘effectual call’ to distinguish it from a human call which might or might not be effective. So the calling of Christians is unique to them.”⁴¹ All Christians

³⁸ 1 Samuel 13:14.

³⁹ Reeder and Gragg, 55.

⁴⁰ Matthew 11:28-30.

⁴¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 513.

are called to share in God's salvation purchased by Christ. Paul speaks of this calling in his letter to the Corinthians when he says, "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."⁴² God calls his people to share in the membership of Christ's body, the church.

When God calls a person into fellowship with Christ through the gospel, he also calls that person to a life of service through good works. The Apostle Paul writes, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."⁴³ So, a call to follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is a general call to serve Christ in ministry. As Edmund Clowney observes, "There is no call to the ministry that is not first a call to Christ. You dare not lift your hands to place God's name in blessing on his people until you have first clasped them in penitent petition for his saving grace."⁴⁴ Every believer has been called and gifted by God for works of service in Christ's kingdom.

Yet, beyond the effectual calling of the elect, there is the particular calling which God places upon a person to be a spiritual shepherd of his people. This is a call not to lord one's authority over people, but to become a servant to them. Oswald Sanders asserts, "True leadership is found in giving yourself in service to others, not in coaxing or inducing others to serve you. The true spiritual leader is focused on the service he can render to God and other people, not on the residuals and perks of high office or holy title."⁴⁵

⁴² 1 Corinthians 1:9.

⁴³ Ephesians 2:10.

⁴⁴ Edmund P. Clowney, *Called to the Ministry* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1964), 5.

⁴⁵ Sanders, 15.

The call to spiritual shepherding originates with God. No one has the authority to take on the role of spiritual shepherd except if the Chief Shepherd first calls and gifts him for this peculiar work. This divine call is one of the essential elements that must be present in those who would lead God's people. There must be an ambition, a drive to want to be a spiritual shepherd. As Paul declares to Timothy, "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task."⁴⁶ The man who would serve Christ's church as a spiritual shepherd must desire that work.

Some may argue that ambition is a sinful desire and should be avoided in spiritual leaders. However, Sanders notes that, "Ambition that centers on the glory of God and welfare of the church is a mighty force for good."⁴⁷ Lawrence Eyres argues that

The male members of the church ought more readily to ask themselves whether God might possibly want them to be elders. It is not wrong to desire the eldership! A man, full of a desire to serve Christ in his church, will then examine himself and study to grow up in to that maturity which is in Christ. And so, when there is a need for him, he will be ready to serve, and the church's choosing will be far less hazardous.⁴⁸

Some of the church's greatest leaders testify to the vital importance of this supernatural call from God upon the life of one who would serve as a shepherd of Christ's flock. John Calvin wrote, "Special care was taken that no one should assume public office in the church without being called. Therefore, if a man were to be considered a true minister of the church, he must first have been duly called."⁴⁹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon exhorted his students who were preparing for the pastoral ministry,

⁴⁶ 1 Timothy 3:1.

⁴⁷ Sanders, 15.

⁴⁸ Eyres, 10-11.

⁴⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 2:1062.

All are not called to labour in word and doctrine, or to be elders, or to exercise the office of a bishop; nor should all aspire to such works, since the gifts necessary are nowhere promised to all. No man may intrude into the sheepfold as an under-shepherd; he must have an eye to the chief Shepherd, and wait his beck and command. Or ever a man stands forth as God's ambassador, he must wait for the call from above.⁵⁰

Spurgeon goes on to say, “The first sign of the heavenly call is an intense, all-absorbing desire for the work.”⁵¹ Both Spurgeon and Calvin stressed the importance of the call to provide divine authority to those Christ commissions to the task of leading his flock.

In the Old Testament, when God set apart individuals to spiritual leadership, he made his intentions clear to the individual. They knew they were being set apart for a special work. It was clear to Moses that God was calling him to shepherd Israel. Abraham, Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jonah, Samuel, David, Elijah and Elisha were all aware that God had called them to the work of shepherding his people.

In the New Testament, John the Baptist was called and set apart by God before he was born. Jesus personally called each of the twelve apostles into their specialized ministry. On the road to Damascus, God appeared to Saul to call him to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Paul described his calling this way: “For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.”⁵² In every case, the call of God upon the individual’s life was an essential part of their ministry. When Matthias was chosen to replace Judas, the church clearly believed that God had already chosen the person to take Judas’ place. So, they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take

⁵⁰ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1977), 19.

⁵¹ Ibid., 23.

⁵² 1 Timothy 2:7.

over this apostolic ministry.”⁵³ The apostles were certain that God had already put the desire for this ministry in the heart of the man he had chosen. This calling by God to select spiritual shepherds for the church is so emphasized in scripture, that the church is taught to think of their shepherds as gifts from God. “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”⁵⁴

The evidence of God’s specific calling to the ministry of spiritual shepherding is compelling. However, it is not an easy process to discern this call. The Bible describes various ways in which individuals were called, but it does not give a formula for how to discern that call. Most of those who received a call to leadership heard God speak in an audible voice or saw him in a vision. Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Isaiah, Jonah, and Paul are all examples of those who experienced this kind of unmistakable call. But, now that the canon of scripture is complete, we should be careful not to make the experiences of the prophets and apostles normative for discerning God’s call today. So how does God call men to be spiritual shepherds today?

According to the literature, several criteria or tests emerge which help a man discern God’s call to be a spiritual shepherd. First, God’s call comes with an inward prompting of the Holy Spirit. This prompting is not mere emotionalism. Rather, it is the work of God in a man’s life, giving him a growing desire for the ministry. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who served as pastor for many years at Westminster Chapel in London, describes this prompting this way:

A call generally starts in the form of a consciousness within one's own spirit, an awareness of a kind of pressure being brought to bear upon one's spirit, some

⁵³ Acts 1:24-25.

⁵⁴ Ephesians 4:11-12.

disturbance in the realm of the spirit. This is something that happens to you. It is God dealing with you and God acting upon you by His Spirit. It is something you become aware of rather than what you do. It is thrust upon you.⁵⁵

This experience is somewhat subjective and may vary from person to person. However, a person who is in fellowship with Jesus and abiding in his Word may be assured that the Holy Spirit will be guiding him as he has promised. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”⁵⁶

Second, the church must affirm a call to shepherd God’s people. The affirmation of other believers, especially other men who have been called by God to serve as spiritual shepherds, is essential. The apostle Paul reminded Timothy of the church’s confirmation of his ministry when he wrote, “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.”⁵⁷ Paul spoke of the church recognizing God’s call on his own life in the second chapter of Galatians. “When James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.”⁵⁸ The affirmation of the church does not add anything to God’s call, but gives more evidence that the Spirit is at work in a man’s life to make him a spiritual shepherd. Charles Spurgeon affirms this when he writes, “The will of the Lord concerning pastors is made known through the prayerful judgment of His

⁵⁵ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, Ministry Resources Library (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 104.

⁵⁶ Proverbs 3:5-6.

⁵⁷ 1 Timothy 4:14.

⁵⁸ Galatians 2:9.

church.”⁵⁹ The call to be a spiritual shepherd is the sovereign work of God in a man’s life, but the Lord uses the means of his church to affirm that call.

Third, God’s call is further confirmed by the particular desire of the man to be engaged in the work of shepherding. Martyn Lloyd-Jones argues, “The true call always includes a concern about others, an interest in them, a realization of their lost estate and condition, and a desire to do something about them.”⁶⁰ Before Paul discusses the various character requirements of a spiritual shepherd, he tells Timothy that the first thing to look for in a man is the desire for the work. “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.”⁶¹

This desire developed into a compulsion for the prophet Jeremiah when he said, “If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,’ there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”⁶² Paul comes to the same conclusion in 1 Timothy 3:1 when he writes, “For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”⁶³ Sinclair Ferguson gives helpful guidance in working through our personal desires when he says,

Our desires on their own are not trustworthy. But at the same time, taken along with other considerations, they may point us in the direction of the service for which God created us. If a sphere of work and service is God’s will for us, we should expect that some measure of aspiration for it will develop in our hearts.⁶⁴

Finally, the call to spiritual shepherding is affirmed by the giving of the necessary abilities required to perform the work. If God calls a man to serve as a shepherd of his

⁵⁹ Spurgeon, 29.

⁶⁰ Lloyd-Jones, 104.

⁶¹ 1 Timothy 3:1.

⁶² Jeremiah 20:9.

⁶³ 1 Corinthians 9:16.

⁶⁴ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Discovering God’s Will* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), 88.

people, he will most certainly provide that man with everything necessary to function effectively in that role. Christ-like character and an eager desire for the work are essential, but they are not enough. The spiritual shepherd must be gifted for the task. Edmund Clowney observes, “The particular service a man is called to give is determined by the gifts he has received. The principle of stewardship in Christ’s Kingdom leads us to conclude that the call to the shepherding ministry comes to those who have the gifts for such a ministry.”⁶⁵ However, it is an oversimplification to say that if you are gifted, you are also called to a shepherding ministry. Such a stance seems to remove the affirmations listed above from necessary consideration. Nevertheless, Clowney’s view does challenge all those with shepherding gifts to reflect deeply on the responsibilities that follow such gifting.

These tests are valuable for the emerging spiritual shepherd to consider in the process of developing clarity and conviction concerning God’s call upon his life. Derek Prime and Alistair Begg believe that along with these tests, those called by God to be spiritual shepherds will likewise be given several continuing proofs of God’s call as they continue in the work of ministry.

First, they recognize that their gifts are from God and are therefore a sacred trust to be used faithfully. Second, they desire to speak the very words of God and not their own opinions. Third, they will not look for praise from men, but from God alone. And fourth, they persevere in the work of shepherding in the strength that God supplies.⁶⁶

These proofs serve as helpful indicators for a man in discerning God’s call upon his life as a spiritual shepherd, and should encourage him to eagerly embrace that call.

⁶⁵ Clowney, 78-79.

⁶⁶ Derek Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 33-34.

Gerald Borchert, professor of New Testament at Southern Seminary, offers this challenge to those seeking to discern God's call to be a spiritual shepherd. He writes,

Being called by God to ministry means a whole new way of life. It means a new lifestyle of complete consistency between words and actions. It means an expectation that God will grace you with developing gifts for ministry. It means an acceptance of your responsibility before God for nurturing and using these gifts. It means an embracing of your uniqueness as a servant of Christ. It means a commitment to give the Lord your best in study, in faithfulness, and in caring for others. And finally, it means that God will continually surprise you with a growing sense of purpose and fulfillment as you discover and make use of the gifts he gives you for ministry.⁶⁷

If God has called a person to be a spiritual shepherd, he will help with discerning that call. There should be a deep assurance that God is for us and will make his will known to us. Sinclair Ferguson provides insight and comfort as he writes,

God is not in a hurry. That is what you must learn. That is what you can learn from the exhortations in the Psalms to *wait for the Lord*. There is no need to panic or to be anxious. He is a Father; he knows what we need before we ask him.⁶⁸

The Character Qualities of Spiritual Shepherds

There must not only be a call from God to be a spiritual shepherd, but as Thabiti Anyabwile suggests, "The nobility of the office of elder demands a correspondingly noble character. Churches must therefore seek men whose inner and outer lives are sewn together by integrity and Christlikeness."⁶⁹ Paul states emphatically that "An overseer must be above reproach."⁷⁰ As Anyabwile explains,

Being above reproach means that an elder is to be the kind of man whom no one suspects of wrongdoing and immorality. Being above reproach does not mean that he maintains sinless perfection. It means that his demeanor and behavior over

⁶⁷ David P. Gushee and Walter C. Jackson, *Preparing for Christian Ministry: An Evangelical Approach* (Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1996), 103.

⁶⁸ Ferguson, 79.

⁶⁹ Anyabwile, 57.

⁷⁰ 1 Timothy 3:2.

time have garnered admiration from others. He lives a life worthy of the calling of God.⁷¹

It is godly character that qualifies a person to be a spiritual shepherd and leader of others. As Robert Murray M'Cheyne once wrote to a friend, "In great measure, according to the purity and perfections of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents that God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God."⁷² Os Guinness concurs.

Far from a cliché or a matter of hollow civic piety, character in leaders is important for two key reasons: Externally, character provides the point of trust that links leaders with followers; internally, character is the part-gyroscope, part-brake that provides the leader's strongest source of bearings and restraint. In many instances the first prompting to do good and the last barrier against doing wrong are the same—character.⁷³

While this is true for leadership in general, it is especially applicable to spiritual leadership. When God told the prophet Samuel to look for the next king of Israel, Samuel was overly impressed with Jesse's first-born son, Eliab, because of his physical traits. "But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.'"⁷⁴

Even more than a clear call from God, it is people's character that qualifies them as spiritual leaders. When the apostle Paul told Titus to appoint elders in the churches of Crete, he gave him a list of character qualifications required for such leadership. The same essential list of character qualifications was also given to Timothy in Ephesus. In

⁷¹ Anyabwile, 57.

⁷² Andrew A. Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 281.

⁷³ Os Guinness, *Character Counts: Leadership Qualities in Washington, Wilberforce, Lincoln, and Solzhenitsyn* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 4.

⁷⁴ 1 Samuel 16:7.

these lists, Paul emphasizes that it is a man's character that qualifies or disqualifies him as a spiritual shepherd.

What are the character qualities necessary for a spiritual shepherd to possess?

Paul lists fifteen different character traits in his letters to Timothy and Titus. Peter includes four. If we included the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit, there would be at least twenty-eight different character qualities required for spiritual shepherds. For the purposes of this research, these characteristics will be organized into the categories of humility, faith, and love.

In his classic book on spiritual leadership, Oswald Sanders states,

Humility is the hallmark of the spiritual leader. Christ told his disciples to turn away from the pompous attitudes of the oriental despots, and instead take on the lowly bearing of the servant. As in the ancient days, so today humility is least admired in political and business circles. But no bother! The spiritual leader will choose the hidden path of sacrificial service and approval of the Lord over the flamboyant self-advertising of the world.⁷⁵

In his book on biblical eldership, Alexander Strauch surveys numerous passages in the Gospels, showing how Jesus stressed the necessity of humility in the lives of his disciples. One of those texts is Luke 22:24-27.

A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves."⁷⁶

Strauch laments, "Sadly, the same competitive, self-seeking spirit exhibited by the disciples is alive today."⁷⁷ And David Prior contends, "Competitiveness is a cancer. Jesus recognized it as completely hostile to the reality of power which he was teaching and

⁷⁵ Sanders, 61.

⁷⁶ Luke 22:24-27.

⁷⁷ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995), 90.

demonstrating.”⁷⁸ The apostle Peter writes, “Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.”⁷⁹ Peter issues this command for mutual humility in the church in the context of his instructions to the shepherds of God’s flock. While humility is in large demand in the lives of spiritual shepherds, it appears to be in short supply.

We have, however, numerous examples of humble leaders in the Bible. Abraham showed great humility in allowing Lot to choose which piece of land he would possess for himself and his family. Joseph displayed humility in providing for his brothers after being ruthlessly betrayed by them. It is said of Moses, “Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.”⁸⁰ David humbled himself before the Lord when the prophet Nathan confronted him with his sin. John the Baptist evidenced humility when he said of Jesus, “He must increase, but I must decrease.”⁸¹ And it was Jesus who said of John the Baptist, “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”⁸²

It is in the person of Jesus Christ that we see humility personified. Jesus said of himself, “I am gentle and lowly in heart.”⁸³ On the night he was betrayed by Judas, Jesus lived out the meaning of humility by getting up from the meal, taking off his outer

⁷⁸ David Prior, *Jesus and Power*, The Jesus Library (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 82.

⁷⁹ 1 Peter 5:5-6.

⁸⁰ Numbers 12:3.

⁸¹ John 3:30.

⁸² Matthew 11:11.

⁸³ Matthew 11:29.

garments, wrapping a towel around his waist, and stooping to wash the grimy feet of his power-grabbing disciples. In doing this, Jesus said he has set an example for his followers. “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.”⁸⁴ Pastor and author Bill Hull contends that because Jesus washed Judas’ feet, along with the others, “Jesus is teaching that his disciples will grow in humility as they willingly serve others, particularly people who make it difficult to serve.”⁸⁵ Hull also says that when Jesus modeled humility by washing his disciples feet, he was teaching them about forgiveness. “We all have within us those submerged continents of pride that nurse grudges and feel like telling others off. But our calling is one of mercy, not of sacrifice and judgment.”⁸⁶

The ultimate demonstration of humility was in Jesus’ suffering and humiliation on the cross. “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”⁸⁷ In calling the Philippian Christians to a life of humility, the apostle Paul writes, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”⁸⁸ This is especially true of spiritual shepherds. Thabiti Anyabwile argues that the character quality of humility is so important to spiritual shepherding because of the dangers of pride. “Pride causes us to think more highly of ourselves than of others. It affects how we treat the sheep, perhaps even tempting us to treat them harshly. It also makes us unwilling to follow other leaders.”⁸⁹ John White, who served in leadership for

⁸⁴ John 13:14-15.

⁸⁵ Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciple-Maker* (Old Tappan, NJ: F.H. Revell, 1990), 202.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Philippians 2:6-8.

⁸⁸ Philippians 2:5.

⁸⁹ Anyabwile, 100-101.

many years with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, agrees. “The true leader serves, and in so doing will not always be popular. But because true leaders are motivated by loving concern rather than a desire for personal glory, they are willing to pay the price.”⁹⁰

Leadership author Max De Pree concurs, saying, “Above all, leadership is a position of servanthood. Leadership is also a posture of debt; it is a forfeiture of rights.”⁹¹ According to these authors, spiritual leadership is humble-hearted, servant leadership.

The question still remains of how to go about developing humble-hearted spiritual shepherds. God uses the ordinary means of grace, such as the Bible, prayer, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and the community of the church. These are the ordinary ways God brings to his people the benefits of Christ’s redemptive work. Through these means God the Holy Spirit develops our faith and conforms our character to the likeness of Christ’s. These ordinary means must be pursued by spiritual shepherds in order for these character qualities to be developed.

However, the Bible reveals that one of God’s tools for shaping humble-hearted shepherds is the furnace of suffering. He sends his servants trials so they will not rely on themselves, but on him. Paul understood the purpose of suffering in his life when he said, “Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.”⁹² James tells us to rejoice in our sufferings because God is using them to produce the character of Christ in us. “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you

⁹⁰ John White, *Excellence in Leadership: Reaching Goals with Prayer, Courage & Determination* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 88.

⁹¹ Max De Pree, *Leadership Jazz* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1992), 220.

⁹² 2 Corinthians 1:9.

may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”⁹³ Paul gives thanks to God for the thorn in his flesh that was given to him in order to keep him from developing a prideful heart. “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”⁹⁴ And the author of Hebrews tells us that it was in the crucible of his own personal suffering where our Lord Jesus learned obedience. “Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.”⁹⁵ Though he was sinless, Jesus learned through his sufferings what obedience to God was about. Therefore, when we suffer as followers of Christ, we become more like him.

In their research on pastoral ministry, Robert Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie argue that hardships are one of God’s primary tools for developing godly character in spiritual leaders. “If pastors want to raise the spiritual and emotional health of their leadership boards and congregations, they will need to create conversations in which hardships can be named and discussed.”⁹⁶ The authors contend that pastors must first embrace and learn from their own suffering if they want those they lead to do the same. “Congregational maturity will never adequately develop unless the leaders of the congregation embrace the difficult lessons learned by hardships and mistakes.”⁹⁷ According to Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, when pastors fail to do this, it sends the wrong message and stunts the learning and growth of the congregation.

⁹³ James 1:2-4.

⁹⁴ 2 Corinthians 12:9.

⁹⁵ Hebrews 5:8.

⁹⁶ Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 205.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

The literature shows that it is through the ordinary means of grace, including suffering and hardship, that God develops, and the church helps to cultivate, humility in the lives of spiritual shepherds. Closely associated with humility is the character quality of faith. The humble spiritual shepherd is one who lives by faith in the promises of God. The writer of Hebrews, in his famous section on faith, makes an unvarnished statement about what pleases God. “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”⁹⁸ It is unmistakable. God takes no pleasure in leaders, or anyone, no matter how humble they may appear, apart from faith in him. The prophet Habakkuk wrote, “The righteous shall live by faith.”⁹⁹ Faith is required not only of spiritual shepherds, but of all disciples of Jesus. Yet a strong and growing confidence in God is essential in the lives of those who would lead his people.

Jesus makes faith in him an explicit requirement for spiritual leadership. In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus rebukes his disciples five times for their failure to trust him. Paul writes to Titus and tells him that since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”¹⁰⁰ The apostle James calls the elders of the church to pray over their sick members, doing so in faith. “And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.”¹⁰¹ Then, James uses Elijah as an example of a spiritual shepherd who prayed in faith, believing God would hear and

⁹⁸ Hebrews 11:6.

⁹⁹ Habakkuk 2:4.

¹⁰⁰ Titus 1:9.

¹⁰¹ James 5:15.

answer. Luke tells us in Acts that when the apostles told the people to choose men to help them with the ministry of mercy, the people were instructed to choose men who were known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. Stephen, the first man listed, is described as “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰² It was Stephen’s faith in Christ that led him eventually to become the first Christian martyr. The labors of the apostles and other church leaders show that the work of a spiritual shepherd requires a deep and abiding faith in God.

John White contends that the key to developing this deep and abiding faith is to continually respond in obedience to God’s Word, especially when there are no visible signs of encouragement to do so. “The growth of such faith flourishes through persisting with God during those hard circumstances.”¹⁰³ While he understands that God is at work to increase the faith of spiritual shepherds, White says believers have a responsibility for fostering such growth. He urges several specific actions that a person can take to increase his faith. “First, one can reflect back on difficult experiences. Second, one can reflect upon the promises of God. The Bible provides witnesses to present-day saints that faith is worth it! Therefore, the saturation of one’s mind with Scripture is essential to growing faith.”¹⁰⁴

Hudson Armerding, former president of Wheaton College, says that faith is an essential quality in spiritual leaders because of who God is. “We believe in a God who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. Faith is important primarily

¹⁰² Acts 6:5.

¹⁰³ John White, *The Fight: A Practical Handbook for Christian Living* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 102.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 107-112.

because of the character of God.”¹⁰⁵ Armerding points to Abraham as the classic example of faith in a spiritual leader because Abraham’s faith was evidenced by obedience to God. “Abraham obeyed God’s command and went out, not knowing where he was going. And God honored Abraham because of his faith. In fact, when he came into the land, there the Lord added to what He had originally declared to Abraham: ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’”¹⁰⁶

Hezekiah is another example of a spiritual shepherd who exhibited great faith in God, and whose faith built confidence in the people he led. When Jerusalem was surrounded by Sennacherib’s army, Hezekiah turned to God in prayer and strengthened his people, declaring, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles.”¹⁰⁷ The passage goes on to say, “And the people took confidence from the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.”¹⁰⁸ Spiritual shepherds develop a deep and abiding faith in God through the courageous and faithful obedience of other leaders.

In his classic book on discipleship, A. B. Bruce considers how Jesus developed the faith of his disciples through the narratives of the two storms on the Sea of Galilee, as told in Matthew 14, Mark 6, and John 6. In one storm Jesus is with the disciples, but sleeping in the rear of the boat. In the other storm, Jesus sent the disciples out on the sea by themselves while he stayed on land to pray. Bruce writes,

The storm on the lake was for the twelve an important lesson in faith, helping to prepare them for the future which awaited them. Their experience in this instance

¹⁰⁵ Hudson T. Armerding, *The Heart of Godly Leadership* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1992), 94.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁰⁷ 2 Chronicles 32:7-8a.

¹⁰⁸ 2 Chronicles 32:8b.

was fitted to teach a lesson for life to have firm faith in His wise and loving care for His cause and people and to glory in tribulation, because of the great deliverance which would surely follow.¹⁰⁹

Bruce argues that the point of the stories is to show the utter dependency of the disciples on Jesus, and how they must call out to him in faith, trusting God's promises. Gerald Borchert summarizes this conviction, saying, "Humble dependence upon God is what God is looking for. It is the key to exemplifying the fruit of the Spirit, which characterizes mature Christian living."¹¹⁰ God cultivates this fruit of faith in the lives of spiritual shepherds through times of great testing which he has ordained.

Spiritual shepherds must possess not only the character qualities of humility and faith, but also of love. Hudson Armerding notes that "When the characteristics of leaders are enumerated, love is not usually included. Yet this quality is central to the Christian life and to the Christian leader."¹¹¹ The Bible places a primacy on the fruit of love above all other virtues. It comes first in the list of the fruit of the Spirit. Paul devotes a long section to the essence of love in his first letter to the Corinthians. Jesus taught that all the Law and the Prophets hang on the two commandments to love God and to love one's neighbor. On the night before his crucifixion Jesus told his disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."¹¹² As Francis Schaeffer was noted for saying, love is the mark

¹⁰⁹ Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, Kregel Reprint Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1971), 131-132.

¹¹⁰ Gushee and Jackson, 100.

¹¹¹ Armerding, 65.

¹¹² John 13:34-35.

of the Christian, which “should be the attitude that governs our outward observable actions.”¹¹³

The writers of the New Testament emphasize the primacy of love in the life of the believer. The apostle Peter writes, “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.”¹¹⁴ Paul urges the Colossians, “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”¹¹⁵ And the apostle John pleads, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.”¹¹⁶ This command to love is to be a primary concern for all believers, but spiritual shepherds are under a much greater responsibility and accountability to demonstrate this love through their leadership of God’s people. Jesus provides the ultimate example of what it means to love people. As the apostle Paul put it, “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.”¹¹⁷ In contrasting himself with the hirelings who do not love the sheep, Jesus declares, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”¹¹⁸ Jesus shows us that the spiritual shepherd’s love for people is a commitment to their well-being. Joseph Stowell counsels that the spiritual shepherd does not relate to the sheep like an executive does to a corporation. “As loving shepherds we will spend a lot of time rescuing lambs from

¹¹³ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Mark of the Christian* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 9.

¹¹⁴ 1 Peter 4:8.

¹¹⁵ Colossians 3:14.

¹¹⁶ 1 John 4:7.

¹¹⁷ Ephesians 5:25-26.

¹¹⁸ John 10:11.

thickets, extracting thorns and cleaning wounds. This is all done that they might grow and prosper on behalf of and for the benefit of the One to whom they belong.”¹¹⁹

The love of a spiritual shepherd is a committed determination to protect and provide for the sheep.

John Stott notes that spiritual shepherds are also called “fathers” in the New Testament. This analogy is meant to convey an intimately affectionate relationship. Paul uses this metaphor in referring to his love and affection for the churches he planted. To the Corinthians he wrote, “For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”¹²⁰ And to the church in Thessalonica, he said, “For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.”¹²¹

Regarding Paul’s use of this metaphor, Stott writes, “Love, then, is the chief quality of a father to which the Apostle refers when he uses the metaphor to illustrate his ministry; not a soft or sickly sentimentality, but a strong, unselfish love which cares and which is not incompatible with discipline.”¹²² Stott shows how love will likely express itself in the spiritual shepherd’s ministry. He indicates at least six actions that will flow from a spiritual leader’s love, revealing how a spiritual shepherd expresses a heart of love for God’s people.

¹¹⁹ Joseph M. Stowell, *Shepherding the Church into the 21st Century* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1994), 156.

¹²⁰ 1 Corinthians 4:15.

¹²¹ 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12.

¹²² John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait: Some New Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 84-85.

First, Stott says that love will cause a spiritual shepherd to be understanding in their approach to people. The spiritual shepherd is called to care for people who have any number of problems that burden them. Stott writes, “Love will work to understand the people deeply, even though the shepherd may be sheltered from such difficulties in his own personal life. This requires time spent with the people. It is when the shepherd loves the flock that they are likely to think, ‘He understands me.’”¹²³

Second, Stott contends that love will make a spiritual shepherd gentle in their manner with people. “He will not be harsh but tender and gentle in all his dealings with the people. Jesus himself was gentle and humble of heart. Such love keeps a spiritual shepherd from growing sour, cynical, or embittered against the flock when they disappoint or hurt him.”¹²⁴

Third, love will not only make a spiritual shepherd understanding and gentle, but love will make a spiritual shepherd simple in his teaching. “If a shepherd loves his people, he will not try to impress them with his knowledge, but will humble himself to the child's level. He will feed the children with milk first so that they can grow.”¹²⁵

Fourth, love will lead a spiritual shepherd to be earnest in his appeal. “Just as a father cannot bear to see his children go astray and walk into danger without becoming zealous in his entreaty to them, so the spiritual shepherd will behave toward God's flock.”¹²⁶ The puritan pastor Richard Baxter states, “We must be serious, earnest and zealous in every part of our work. The weight of our matter condemneth coldness and

¹²³ Ibid., 87-88.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 89-90.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 91-92.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 94.

sleepy dullness. To speak slightly of heavenly things is nearly as bad as to say nothing of them at all.¹²⁷

Fifth, Stott says that love will make a spiritual shepherd consistent in his example. “He knows the power of modeling the truth.”¹²⁸ The spiritual shepherd will recall Jesus’ warning, “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”¹²⁹ And he will heed Peter’s exhortation to shepherd God’s sheep, “not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”¹³⁰ The spiritual leader who loves God will be a consistent example of Christ’s love to his people.

Sixth, love will make a spiritual shepherd conscientious in his prayers.

Love makes one diligent in the hard work of praying for people. This is a secret work and the shepherd will make time for it only if he loves people enough to benefit them with it. This creates a special bond of love as the shepherd prays for and with the flock under his care.¹³¹ A spiritual shepherd can read about love, teach about love, and pray for it in his life, and in the lives of those with whom he is working. But, ultimately, Christian love is a fruit of the Spirit’s work in a person’s life.

The Competencies of a Spiritual Shepherd

Beyond the divine calling and character qualifications, the literature on spiritual shepherding contends that spiritual leaders must possess the competency to carry out the responsibilities of their calling. As Henry and Richard Blackaby write, “Integrity alone is

¹²⁷ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, Puritan Paperbacks (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 117.

¹²⁸ Stott, 96-97.

¹²⁹ Matthew 18:6.

¹³⁰ 1 Peter 5:3.

¹³¹ Stott, 98-99.

not sufficient to ensure successful leadership. A leader must also have competence.”¹³²

While a spiritual shepherd must be able to do a number of things well, the primary responsibilities fall into the areas of feeding, leading, and caring for God’s flock.

C.E. Jefferson argues that first among the shepherding roles is that of feeding the flock with the word of God.

Everything depends on the proper feeding of the sheep. Unless wisely fed they become emaciated and sick. When Ezekiel presents a picture of the bad shepherd, the first stroke of his brush is—“he does not feed the flock.” When Jesus hands over the church to Simon Peter, his first word is—“feed.” The work of feeding is never to be neglected.¹³³

The sheep are dependent upon the shepherd to feed them because they cannot adequately feed themselves.

The work of feeding the sheep of Christ is done through the teaching and preaching of his Word. Therefore, a spiritual shepherd must be apt to teach. “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”¹³⁴ In his second letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul counsels his young disciple, “And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”¹³⁵ This aptness and ability to feed the flock the word of God is essential to the task of shepherding.

In the early days of the church, the apostles saw it as their foundational responsibility to teach the scriptures, thus obeying Jesus’ commission to teach the disciples all that he had commanded. After thousands were converted to Christ at

¹³² Blackaby and Blackaby, 107.

¹³³ Charles Edward Jefferson, *The Minister as Shepherd* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1998), 59-60.

¹³⁴ Titus 1:9.

¹³⁵ 2 Timothy 2:2.

Pentecost, Peter and the others immediately began teaching the word of God. The church in Jerusalem met together regularly and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. When Barnabas recruited Paul to help him in Antioch, it was for the purpose of teaching the believers. "For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians."¹³⁶ This pattern of teaching became the norm for Paul's missionary journeys.

When Paul planted a church, he appointed a plurality of elders to carry on the work of feeding the flock. "Paul instructed Timothy and Titus to pass the baton to the elders in Ephesus and Crete, who in turn were to be faithful shepherds who would feed the flock."¹³⁷ He urged Timothy, "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching."¹³⁸ And in Paul's final letter to Timothy, he tells him, "and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."¹³⁹

In a similar way, Paul writes to Titus regarding each man who would be appointed as a spiritual shepherd: "He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it."¹⁴⁰ Since the church is the pillar and buttress of the truth, its shepherds must know the truth and be able to feed it to the sheep for their spiritual nourishment.

Alexander Strauch notes, "The Bible is God's complete training manual for all spiritual leaders. A leader who does not know the Bible is like a shepherd without legs; he can't

¹³⁶ Acts 11:26.

¹³⁷ Gene A. Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church: A Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Perspective* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 193.

¹³⁸ 1 Timothy 4:13.

¹³⁹ 2 Timothy 2:2.

¹⁴⁰ Titus 1:9.

lead or protect the flock.”¹⁴¹ Quoting British theologian P. T. Forsyth, Strauch contends, “The real strength of the Church is not the amount of its work but the quality of its faith. One man who truly knows his Bible is worth more to the Church’s real strength than a crowd of workers who do not.”¹⁴²

In thinking about this competency of feeding the flock with God’s Word, the scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit does not give all spiritual shepherds the same gifts or ministries or effects. “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.”¹⁴³ Though Paul wrote these words for the whole church, they are especially applicable to the spiritual shepherds of the church. Some will have greater teaching gifts than others. Some will use their teaching gifts before large crowds, such as in a preaching ministry. Others will feed God’s flock on an individual basis or in small groups. This choice is the Spirit’s sovereign pleasure. All shepherds must be able to feed God’s sheep, but not all will do so with the same skill and effectiveness.

Along with the competency of feeding the flock, spiritual shepherds must be able to lead the flock. Alexander Strauch writes that “In biblical language, to shepherd a nation or any group of people means to lead or to govern.”¹⁴⁴ The image of shepherd as leader is seen in the way the people of Israel spoke to King David, saying, “In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the LORD

¹⁴¹ Strauch, 80.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ 1 Corinthians 12:4-6.

¹⁴⁴ Strauch, 25.

said to you, ‘You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.’”¹⁴⁵

The psalms testify that “God chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the nursing ewes he brought him to shepherd Jacob his people, Israel his inheritance. With upright heart he shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand.”¹⁴⁶ So, when we speak of the shepherd’s overall function, we are talking about the pastoral oversight of the church.

The leading of God’s flock is important because sheep are natural followers.

Charles Jefferson writes:

Sheep are not independent travelers. They must have a human conductor. They cannot go to predetermined place by themselves. They cannot start out in the morning in search of pasture and then come home at evening time. They have, apparently, no sense of direction. The greenest pasture may be only a few miles away, but the sheep left to themselves cannot find it. What animal is more incapable than sheep? Where the shepherd leads, the sheep will go. He knows that the shepherd is a guide and that it is safe to follow him.¹⁴⁷

However, before a man can lead anybody, he must first be a faithful follower. Every spiritual shepherd must follow the Good Shepherd. Even Jesus was a follower. After Jesus had healed the lame man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath day, the Pharisees tried to discredit him. Jesus answered their charges, saying, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”¹⁴⁸ Jesus led by first committing himself to following the Father. Shepherds must remember that they are sheep also. The Bible is filled with examples of people greatly used by God, yet they were primarily noted for

¹⁴⁵ 2 Samuel 5:2.

¹⁴⁶ Psalm 78:70-72.

¹⁴⁷ Jefferson, 47.

¹⁴⁸ John 5:19.

being followers first. Moses, David, Peter, and Paul were men who depended on God as their Shepherd, and they followed him.

Leadership is primarily about influence. It is the process of one person influencing another. Walter Wright, in his book, *Relational Leadership*, makes the point that leadership “is a relationship of influence in which the leader seeks to influence the behavior, attitudes, vision, values or beliefs of another. It is an intentional relationship with a purpose.”¹⁴⁹ A spiritual shepherd, therefore, leads with a view to influencing and preparing the flock for ministry, so that the body is built up in love. As Jay Adams writes, “The shepherd is not serving the flock by attempting to do any of the work for which God holds the flock responsible to accomplish. Such ‘service’ to the flock preempts the blessings that belong to the members and deprives the whole flock of the benefits that God intended for it.”¹⁵⁰ The spiritual shepherd leads the flock by equipping them, feeding them the word of God, and influencing them by his example, all to equip them to do the work of ministry in the power of the Spirit.

To influence people toward Christlikeness, a spiritual shepherd must be an example of Christian living that others will want to follow. “If a man is not a godly model for others to follow, he cannot be an elder even if he is a good teacher and manager.”¹⁵¹ Paul recognizes the importance of modeling Christ to others when he says, “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.”¹⁵² And elsewhere Paul urges, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of

¹⁴⁹ Walter C. Wright, *Relational Leadership: A Biblical Model for Influence and Service* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2000), 31.

¹⁵⁰ Jay Edward Adams, *Shepherding God's Flock: A Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling, and Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Ministry Resources Library, 1986), 339.

¹⁵¹ Strauch, 78.

¹⁵² Philippians 3:17.

Christ.”¹⁵³ As Strauch argues, “The greatest way to inspire and influence people for God is through personal example. Character and deeds, not official position or title, is what really influences people for eternity.”¹⁵⁴ Tim Witmer challenges spiritual shepherds “to lead by example in their relationship with Christ, in the leadership of their families, and in the ministry of the church.”¹⁵⁵ He argues that it is essential that “spiritual shepherds are vital examples of growth not only in these dimensions of the leader’s life, but in the elements of continuing development, which together give a holistic picture of a faithful elder.”¹⁵⁶

A spiritual shepherd must possess the competencies of feeding the sheep, leading the sheep, and then caring for, or nurturing, the souls of the sheep. In order to give this nurturing care to the sheep, the spiritual shepherd must know his sheep. Alistair Begg and Derek Prime offer this encouragement for developing the competency of nurturing: “We must take time and make an effort to know people's names and circumstances. Basic to all pastoral care is knowing the sheep well and loving them in Christ as individuals.”¹⁵⁷ Tim Witmer believes that “Every member should have a personal connection with at least one elder. Real sheep know they belong to a shepherd. They are named, known, and counted every day.”¹⁵⁸ David Dickson captures the heart of a shepherd who knows his flock:

He must be acquainted with them all, old and young, their history, their occupations, their habits, their ways of thinking. They and their children should be their personal friends, so that they naturally turn to him as to one on whom they can depend as a kind and sympathizing friend and a faithful counselor.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ 1 Corinthians 11:1.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Witmer, 163-166.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 166.

¹⁵⁷ Prime and Begg, 155.

¹⁵⁸ Witmer, 122.

¹⁵⁹ David Dickson, *The Elder and His Work* (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1990), 15.

Pastoral care is a conscious decision to intentionally get close to the suffering of people without minimizing or ignoring it. Such caregiving deliberately puts the spiritual shepherd into the experience of others' pain. Pastoral care engages suffering. This is the work in which God engages in his shepherding of us. King David is comforted as he remembers God walking with him in times of darkness: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."¹⁶⁰ Such care is part of the shepherd's work.

Eugene Peterson, in his book on pastoral ministry, *Working the Angles*, explains that one of the basic aspects of nurturing others is giving spiritual direction. "Three pastoral acts are so basic, so critical, that they determine the shape of everything else. The acts are praying, reading Scripture and giving spiritual direction."¹⁶¹ He defines spiritual direction as "the task of helping a person take seriously what is treated dismissively by the publicity-infatuated and crisis-sated mind, and then to receive this mixed and random material of life as the raw material for high holiness."¹⁶² This is another way of saying that spiritual shepherds are called to be disciple-makers. Bill Hull argues that "disciple-making takes more faith than any other pastoral work and that no work of God's servants draws more resistance than disciple-making."¹⁶³ He goes on to say that,

In order to develop the competency of making disciples, the spiritual shepherd must make three commitments: He commits to placing disciple-making at the heart of the church. He commits himself to communicating clearly to the whole church the role of a spiritual shepherd in disciple-making. He is committed to the principle of multiplication of disciples.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Psalm 23:4.

¹⁶¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1987), 2.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁶³ Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor*, 28.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

All the work of a spiritual shepherd is done with the aim of producing spiritually healthy Christians who are being conformed more and more into the likeness of their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. The spiritual shepherd feeds the flock the word of God, leads them as an example of Christ, and gives them nurturing spiritual direction with this goal firmly fixed in his mind: “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”¹⁶⁵ In summary, the call of God upon a man’s life begins the process of moving toward the noble task of spiritual shepherding. The development of Christ-like humility, faith, and love qualifies the man for the task. And the cultivation of specific competencies, such as teaching, leading, and nurturing people, equips the man to be a competent and effective spiritual shepherd among Christ’s flock.

The Learning Process of Spiritual Shepherds

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors develop people as spiritual shepherds for the local church. A primary assumption behind this study is that there are processes by which people learn and grow. One area of literature that discusses those processes is that of adult learning theories and models. In their book, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*, Sharan Merriam, Rosemary Caffarella, and Lisa Baumgartner contend that “learning is a personal process—but a process that is shaped by the context of adult life and the society in which one lives.”¹⁶⁶ Their research has shown that “just as there is no single theory that explains human learning in general, no

¹⁶⁵ Colossians 1:28-29.

¹⁶⁶ Sharan B. Merriam, Rosemary S. Caffarella, and Lisa Baumgartner, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 1.

single theory of adult learning has emerged to unify the field. Rather, there are a number of theories, models, and frameworks, each of which attempts to capture some aspect of adult learning.”¹⁶⁷ In other words, adults learn new information, habits and skills through a variety of means.

One of the ways adults learn is through self-directed learning. According to Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner, self-directed learning is a process “in which people take the primary initiative for planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences.”¹⁶⁸ This model of adult learning, the authors say, “has captured the imagination of researchers and writers both inside and outside the field of adult education. Many public schools and colleges and universities have used this concept to describe one of the primary goals of their institutions: to enable their students to be life-long, self-directed learners.”¹⁶⁹

Spiritual shepherds, of all people, should be lifelong learners, continually growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Pastors can encourage self-directed learning as one of the tools to help people in their congregations discern God’s call to serve as a spiritual shepherd, and also to help them develop the character and competencies required for the task.

Another model of adult learning, according to Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, is transformational learning.

Transformational learning is about change—dramatic, fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and the world in which we live. Unlike informational learning, which refers to extending already established cognitive capacities into new terrain, transformational learning refers to changing *what* we know.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 103.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 110.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 105.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 130.

An example of transformational learning in the life of a spiritual shepherd might be a traumatic life experience that ultimately converts belief in God's sovereignty from merely a theological concept into a personal, living hope that God is divinely orchestrating the events of one's life. Transformational learning could be as simple as trying to lead a small group Bible study for the first time and feeling like a total failure. These life experiences create opportunities for fundamental change to take place in the way we see ourselves and the world in which we live.

In their book *The Leadership Challenge*, James Kouzes and Barry Posner shed light on the concept of transformational learning. They contend that

People never do anything perfectly the first time they try it—not in sports, not in games, not in school, and most certainly not in work organizations. Over and over again, people in our studies tell us how important mistakes and failure have been to their success. Without mistakes we'd be unable to know what we can and cannot do.¹⁷¹

Transformational learning happens when we encounter failure, suffering, or some other life-changing experience. Whatever the context may be, learning is the objective. And learning happens best when people feel safe talking about their experiences, both successes and failures. Kouzes and Posner assert that learning “happens when people can openly talk about what went right and what went wrong. Leaders don't look for someone to blame when the inevitable mistakes are made in the name of innovation. They ask, ‘What can be learned from the experience?’”¹⁷² Change in people's lives best happens in mutually safe, accountable relationships, in which successes as well as failures can be shared and discussed.

¹⁷¹ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 199.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 200.

Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner agree, saying, “Experience is integral to learning. Adults bring with them a depth and breadth of experience that can be used as a resource for their and others’ learning.” However, experience alone is not sufficient for transformational learning to take place. There must be some measure of critical reflection on the experience. “With an experience that one cannot accommodate into the prior life structure, the transformative learning process can begin. Necessary to the process is critical reflection.”¹⁷³ The authors make a distinction between merely reflecting on an experience and critical reflection. “Reflection is a cognitive process. We can think about our experience—muse, review, and so on—but to reflect critically, we must also examine the underlying beliefs and assumptions that affect how we make sense of the experience.”¹⁷⁴ Critical reflection, in other words, requires the learner to think deeply about their lives. It can be developed through the use of a journal to record thoughts and insights about an experience, and by talking about the experience with others. Critical reflection about one’s experiences in the context of community is an especially effective way to promote transformational learning.

In *The Leader’s Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation*, Jim Herrington, Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor make the case that “Effective leaders dramatically increase the likelihood of change when they create a learning community that embraces the values of grace giving and truth telling.”¹⁷⁵ They argue that one of the reasons why we don’t see more Christ-like transformation in our lives and of those we are seeking to lead is because of our approach to learning. “In our

¹⁷³ Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, 145.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor, *The Leader’s Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 145.

culture, learning has become synonymous with possessing information or giving intellectual assent. As important as each of these is, they are not enough to produce behavioral change. Knowing the correct answer is not the same as doing the right thing.”¹⁷⁶

Herrington, Creech, and Taylor agree that there is a process by which adults learn that results in life change. “In our experience, those who achieve change do not embrace a formula or a program. They commit to a process that provides simple guidance in the midst of the complexity of seeking personal transformation. The process is a continuous cycle of information, practice, and reflection.”¹⁷⁷ The Gospel accounts show that Jesus employed this learning model with his disciples. “Using parables and sermons, he taught them basic concepts of kingdom living. He sent them out to practice what they had been learning. When they returned from their practice sessions, he reflected with them on their learning and rejoiced with them in their accomplishment.”¹⁷⁸ Jesus understands better than anyone the process of how people learn and grow into his fruitful image bearers. Therefore he intentionally created environments in which his disciples could gain new experiences and insights, and then offered his guidance as they reflected on those experiences together. Along the same lines, Kouzes and Posner suggest that leaders should create a climate in which others are free to learn. “Promoting learning requires a spirit of inquiry and openness, patience, and building in a tolerance for error and a framework for forgiveness. Learning is more likely to happen in a climate in which people feel safe in making themselves vulnerable, safe in taking the risk of failure.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Kouzes and Posner, 201-202.

Herrington, Creech, and Taylor suggest that leaders who want to promote transformational learning should establish a supportive and accountable community to help themselves and others make the desired changes.

Leaders often live with the illusion that new skills and behaviors can be achieved by an effort of will and hard work. To be sure, engaging one's will and working hard are essential. But that is not enough. The Christian faith boldly and counterculturally invites us to live with transparency and authenticity in a community of grace and truth. Intentionally fostering a learning community is a key element for a successful transformational journey.¹⁸⁰

The authors say that learning in such a community is a powerful tool for personal and corporate transformation. "Peer learning can take on a supportive role that gives an individual a variety of perspectives through which core beliefs can be clarified, anxious behavior identified, and nonreactivity rehearsed and reported on."¹⁸¹ If pastors desire gospel transformational learning in themselves and in the lives of spiritual shepherds, they must encourage and foster authentic Christian community, which continually looks in faith to Jesus Christ. "Failure to keep [Christ's] life in the center of our vision results in the other components for the learning community becoming just another self-help process. But if [Christ] is in our midst, he will draw all the component parts of the process into his life."¹⁸² This is the all-important piece for effectiveness in all the different models of adult learning and leadership development. Apart from constantly abiding in Jesus Christ, we can accomplish nothing of eternal significance. "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 149-150.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 152.

¹⁸² Ibid., 154.

¹⁸³ John 15:4-5.

Summary

In this chapter, the literature on spiritual shepherding has been reviewed. Four particular areas of literature were addressed, namely, the calling of spiritual shepherds, the character and competencies of spiritual shepherds, and the learning process of spiritual shepherds. It was noted that a calling from God to this role is essential to effective ministry in a congregation. This calling entails a desire on the part of the person to do this particular work of shepherding. The call must be affirmed by the congregation of which the shepherd is a member. And the call to spiritual shepherding must be accompanied by the necessary skills to do the work effectively.

Furthermore, the literature showed that along with a divine calling, certain character qualities are required of those who would lead God's people. These character qualities were summarized under the headings of humility, faith, and love, all of which are produced supernaturally in a person by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to being called and having the necessary character, the literature also indicated that spiritual shepherding requires certain competencies, namely, teaching, leading, and giving nurturing spiritual direction to people.

The final area of literature reviewed was that of the learning process of spiritual shepherds. In this area of literature, the question of how adults learn was addressed, and in particular, how spiritual shepherds are developed by their experiences, especially by reflecting on their hardships in the context of a safe and supportive community.

In chapter five, the literature reviewed in this chapter will be compared and contrasted with findings from the study participant interviews presented in chapter four. In the following chapter, however, we will consider the research methodology for this

study, including the study's design, the study participant sample, and the significance and limitations of the research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors develop leaders as spiritual shepherds who will lead their congregations toward greater maturity in Christ. The research design of this study followed a qualitative approach. According to Sharan B. Merriam in *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world.”¹⁸⁴ In this study, therefore, qualitative research provided the researcher an opportunity to understand and learn from the experiences of pastors who are faithfully seeking to develop leaders in their congregations to be spiritual shepherds.

Merriam gives four characteristics of qualitative research. First, “the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning.” Second, “the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis.” Third, “the process is inductive.” And fourth, “the product is richly descriptive.”¹⁸⁵

Because the purpose of this study was to understand a process, qualitative research permitted the researcher to gain a better understanding of how the pastors interviewed went about the task of developing spiritual shepherds. In qualitative research, since the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the

¹⁸⁴ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 13.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

researcher was able to “explore unusual or unanticipated responses.”¹⁸⁶ And, “rather than deductively testing hypotheses,”¹⁸⁷ the researcher sought to explore the varied experiences of the pastors who were interviewed, and then looked for common themes and inductively drew conclusions. Finally, since qualitative research is “richly descriptive,”¹⁸⁸ the researcher took note of phrases and anecdotes used by the pastors interviewed, which gave greater meaning to the experiences relayed and the lessons learned.

Participant Sample Selection

To conduct this study, the researcher interviewed seven pastors who have served as senior pastors of local churches for at least ten years. This particular time frame was chosen to ensure that the pastors interviewed would have had sufficient experience in developing leaders in their congregations, and would have sufficient time to evaluate their effectiveness. In addition, the researcher limited the participants to pastors serving reformed congregations. Five of the pastors interviewed were from Florida, one was from Mississippi, and one was from Washington. A chart showing the relevant information for each participant is included in chapter four.

Data Collection

The data was collected through a semi-structured interview format, which, according to Merriam, is based on flexibly worded questions that “allow the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 16.

ideas on the topic.”¹⁸⁹ The semi-structured protocol also allows the person being interviewed to elaborate on statements through the use of clarifying questions. To conduct the interviews, the researcher either traveled to the churches where the interview participants serve, or spoke to them by telephone.

The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim for the purpose of analysis. The following questions served as the interview protocol:

How would you define a calling from God to serve as a spiritual shepherd?

How do you help a man discern God’s call on his life to serve as a spiritual shepherd?

How does it affect the flock if men are serving in this role without this calling?

If you could choose only three character qualities that a person must have to be a spiritual shepherd, which would you choose? Why?

What do you do as a pastor to help develop these qualities in the lives of people you are seeking to develop as leaders?

What do you believe are the competencies required to be an effective spiritual shepherd? Why?

What is your process for helping potential leaders develop these skills?

If you could start your ministry all over again, what would you do differently to develop spiritual leaders for the church?

Because the interviews followed a semi-structured format, the order of the questions varied, and, in some cases, some questions were omitted entirely.

Data Analysis

After each interview, the recordings were transcribed and studied using the constant comparative method, which, according to Merriam, “involves comparing one

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 90.

segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences.”¹⁹⁰ The constant comparative method is a popular means of data analysis in which “data are grouped together and tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category. The overall object of this analysis is to identify patterns in the data. These patterns are arranged in relationship to each other in the building of a grounded theory.”¹⁹¹

Researcher Position

In a qualitative study, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. This means that all observations and analyses in the study are filtered through the researcher’s perspectives and values. Therefore, researchers must be aware of how their own bias or subjectivity shapes the research process. Moreover, as Merriam writes, the researcher’s “assumptions, experiences, worldviews, and theoretical orientation”¹⁹² should be identified and stated up front.

The researcher who conducted this study has served as a minister in a reformed Presbyterian denomination for twenty years, in both associate and senior pastor roles. The researcher currently serves in a church which he planted eleven years ago. The researcher’s pastoral experience has given him ample opportunity to participate in the process of developing spiritual leaders for a congregation. He realizes that he approached this study with preconceived assumptions about what spiritual leadership is, and that these assumptions influenced his analysis of the data. The focus on this particular area of study stems from the researcher’s own frustrations and failures in developing lay leaders

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 30.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 30-31.

¹⁹² Ibid., 219.

as shepherds of a congregation. The researcher trusts that the semi-structured interviews with the pastors and the answers they supply will provide more objectivity.

Study Limitations

This study was limited to seven male senior pastors of congregations in the reformed tradition. The churches ranged in size from seventy-five members to three hundred and fifty. Due to limited resources and time, the interview analysis and conclusions drawn do not necessarily have universal application to all situations. Additionally, as Sharan Merriam notes regarding all qualitative studies of this nature, “the readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context.”¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Ibid., 179.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA REPORT AND ANALYSIS

This study was designed to explore how pastors develop people as spiritual shepherds for the local church. Three research questions were framed to guide the study.

The research questions were:

1. How do pastors help people discern God's calling to serve as spiritual shepherds?
2. How do pastors help people develop the character required of spiritual shepherds?
3. How do pastors help people develop the competencies required of spiritual shepherds?

Study Participants

In this chapter, the participants of the study will be introduced and their insights concerning the study questions will be presented. Seven participants were interviewed for this study. They all serve as senior pastors of congregations of varying size, each pastor having a minimum of ten years of pastoral ministry experience in the local church. Five of the participants serve churches in Florida. One is a pastor in Mississippi and the other serves in Washington State.

Ben is sixty and has been in pastoral ministry for more than thirty years. He pastors a suburban congregation in Florida and has been at this church for five years. Ben's church has an average worship attendance of seventy-five people on Sunday mornings; he and two elders comprise the leadership team.

Mark is forty-eight and practiced law for several years before attending seminary. Upon graduating from seminary, Mark was called to serve a suburban Florida congregation of one hundred members. He has been at this church for twelve years. Mark

has three elders on his team, all of whom he has personally developed as leaders since he has been their pastor.

Rick is fifty-seven. He has been in pastoral ministry for thirty years. He now serves as senior pastor of a congregation that he planted eleven years ago in the state of Washington. The average worship attendance at Rick's church is eighty people, including children. He works with three other elders on his leadership team, all of whom helped him plant the church.

John is fifty and has been a pastor for twenty years. Before serving as a pastor, John was a business owner. He has served in his present congregation in Florida for fifteen years. John's congregation has 350 people in two worship services on Sunday mornings. His leadership team consists of three other elders.

Tom is fifty-one and has twenty-five years of pastoral experience. He planted a church in south Florida thirteen years ago, where he continues to serve as senior pastor. The average worship attendance at Tom's church is three hundred, and there are three other elders besides himself.

Burt is fifty-eight and has been in the pastorate for over thirty years. He served as an army artillery officer prior to attending seminary. He has been the pastor of his congregation in Mississippi for thirteen years. Approximately 150 people worship there on Sunday mornings. Burt serves alongside six other elders in his church.

Stan is forty-five and remains the pastor of the church he planted in Florida fifteen years ago. There are 250 regular attenders at Stan's church, and he works with three other elders. The following chart shows the profile of each study participant at a glance.

Study Participant Profile

Name	Location	Church Size	Length of Time in Pastoral Ministry	Length of Time at Current Church
Ben	Florida	75	30 years	6 years
Mark	Florida	100	12 years	12 years
Rick	Washington	80	30 years	12 years
John	Florida	350	20 years	15 years
Tom	Florida	300	25 years	14 years
Burt	Mississippi	150	30 years	15 years
Stan	Florida	275	15 years	15 years

How Do Pastors Help People Discern a Calling to be a Spiritual Shepherd?

The first study question asked how pastors help people discern God's calling to serve as spiritual shepherds. Three responses were shared by the study participants. First, the pastors said they spend a lot of time with people to inquire about their desire to serve as a spiritual shepherd. Second, they place great importance on the role of the church community in discerning a call on a person's life. Finally, pastors trust God to work through the ordinary means of grace, especially prayer and the regular preaching ministry, to call people to the work of spiritual shepherding.

Personal Time with the Person to Inquire About Their Desire to Serve

The first response to this question, expressed by all seven participants, was that the pastors spend personal time with the people they are seeking to develop as spiritual shepherds, in order to inquire about their desire for the task. One example of this response comes from Mark, who said,

Well, I don't know any other way to help a guy discern that call apart from time spent with the person. I just start meeting with these guys. If I think a guy is moving in that direction, I suggest to him that we start meeting. And that enables me to take the measure of where he is and where he still needs to grow. If there is a call, they're going to be moving toward ministry. This is not a longing that I have to create.

Tom agreed, stating, "I just spend a lot of time with guys. I have a lot of breakfasts and lunches with them trying to get at whether there is a genuine 'want to' that's free from external pressure and arm twisting."

John was another participant who was quick to point out, "I spend a lot of time with them over coffee and other social settings. I want to discern whether a person is really interested in serving the church or just being served by the church." These answers were indicative of what all the participants said. Each pastor made it a regular part of

their ministry to spend time with current and potential leaders, personally and in groups, in order to observe them in various settings and circumstances. This provided opportunities for the pastors to give feedback to those who sensed God's calling to serve as spiritual shepherds.

The Role of the Church Community

A second response to this question, given by four participants, was the important role the church community plays in helping people discern a call from God to serve as spiritual shepherds. John expressed this when he said, "One of the things I stress with guys is that if you're called, the people around you will recognize you're called. Your life will show that you love the church, the Bride of Christ." He went on to say, "Another thing I look at is whether people will want to follow this person. I want them to meet in small groups with others to see how their gifts are developing." Tom concurred, making the point that in his church there are a lot of observations by a lot of people over a long period of time.

There will be people around this person that believe they are qualified and ready to lead. Our whole system as a church is keyed to look for this. We see movement in ministry from the low risk and low scrutiny to the higher risk and higher scrutiny. We've just tried to create places where people can do all kinds of little doable jobs. And that way we can create all kinds of little data points where we can track a person regarding faithfulness, humility, love for people, etc. No one in our church can ever be considered for the office of elder without having been an effective Community Group leader. That means they have a minimum of at least three years of tracking by a number of people before they are even nominated as an officer in the church.

Stan said that in his church the elders have tried over the years to train the congregation to be on the lookout for people who are serving in various ways and how others are responding to them. Stan said they do this through teaching and preaching the biblical qualifications for officers. When he and the elders see people gravitating to

particular individuals for spiritual counsel and leadership, they begin talking with those people about God's work in their life and how he might be calling them to formal leadership in the church. Stan expressed it this way:

As men begin to serve in the normal course of the life of the church, they begin to discern gifts and passions and abilities. They begin to see they are effective in whatever ways they are serving. Then people start to look to them for spiritual guidance and counsel. People begin to gradually discern that God may be calling them to serve as an officer and the congregation begins to discern this call as well.

Stan told about one of his elders who originally did not think he had the qualifications or skills to be an elder. However, over time, people kept looking to this man for spiritual counsel and were really helped by his godly wisdom. Stan said that church members were coming to him and the other elders to say that this man ought to be an elder. Through much prayer, and many conversations with Stan and the other elders, this man came to see that God really was calling him to serve as a spiritual shepherd in that congregation.

Finally, Burt stated, "God seems to raise up leaders for his church by putting that desire in their hearts and confirming it through the body of Christ. The external part of it is that there's a structure whereby we test that sense of call." Burt explained that in his church governance, which is Presbyterian, the congregation submits the names of people to the elders whom they perceive to be leaders amongst them. Burt said that "through God's providence, the people affirm the nomination of a person by electing them to serve as an elder." So, pastors look not only to their own personal interaction with prospective leaders, but they rely upon the Body of Christ to help people discern a calling to serve as a spiritual shepherd of God's people.

The Ordinary Means of Grace

The third response, given by three of the participants, was that pastors trust God to work through the ordinary means of grace, especially their preaching ministry and prayer, to help people discern God's call on their lives to serve as spiritual shepherds.

Stan noted that

In the context of the life of the church, there's the regular preaching ministry which covers topics such as calling, and particularly calling to the offices of the church. This, by nature, tends to be a much slower process than a more programmatic approach. I don't think you end up with as many leaders, perhaps, as you might otherwise hope for.

Burt agreed, saying,

What I've found is that guys come to me and tell me that they sense God might be calling them to serve in some kind of leadership role. I think in just the regular course of the preaching and teaching ministry of the church, God is working in people's lives to stir up that call, and any other call to serve in some capacity and use their gifts.

Burt shared about a young man named Allen, who had grown up in the congregation where Burt serves as pastor. Allen was serving as a deacon in the church when the elders began discussing the possibility of him becoming an elder. Burt said he scheduled an appointment to talk about this with Allen. When they met together, Burt asked Allen if he sensed God calling him to serve as an elder. Allen said that for many years, he had sat in church and "listened to biblical sermons Sunday after Sunday. And if you would have asked him if he was a Christian, Allen would have said, 'of course.'" However, Allen told Burt that it was his preaching over the last year that God had used to convince him that he was not a Christian. He said, "About six months ago, the Lord spoke very clearly to me that I was not converted and needed to repent and believe the gospel. I did, and now I know for sure that I am a follower of Christ." And it was

through Burt's preaching, according to Allen, that God eventually convinced Allen that he should serve as an elder.

Ben emphasized the importance of prayer in the process by saying,

I begin with prayer. I am looking for people who have that vision of prayer, which brings the power of God in the church. I think we have the tendency to move too fast in bringing men on board as spiritual leaders. Even if God doesn't move and raise people up, we'd still need to depend on him and wait on him in prayer. What I want is for men to grow in their walk with God, even if they never become formal leaders in the church. If we just had a few men who were hungry to grow in their walk with God, and I think that begins with prayer, then that would have a tremendous impact on the healthy growth of the church.

Ben has seen this happen in some small, but encouraging ways in his church. After establishing a monthly congregational prayer meeting, and then calling for special days of prayer and fasting, Ben has witnessed God moving in the lives of a couple of men whom he perceived as spiritually cold. They have expressed a desire to meet with him for more in-depth discipling. This is a direct answer to prayer and has been particularly encouraging to Ben.

Preaching and prayer are two primary ways pastors help people discern God's calling to serve as a spiritual shepherd.

How Do Pastors Help People Develop the Character Qualities Required of Spiritual Shepherds?

The second study question asked how pastors help people develop the character qualities required of spiritual shepherds. Three answers emerged from this question. First, the pastors emphasize preaching as a primary means of producing Christ-like character in people's lives. Second, pastors pray that God will work in people's lives to develop these character qualities. Third, pastors spend time with potential leaders learning together in community. The researcher also asked each participant which character qualities they

most look for in the people they want to develop for spiritual leadership. All seven participants said humility and love were the most important.

Humility and Love Developed Through Preaching

Two of the pastors interviewed said they rely on their preaching as a primary means of developing Christian character in people's lives. When asked what character qualities he thought were most important for spiritual shepherds to possess, Stan offered this comment,

I would say humility, humility, humility. Humility means somebody is teachable and willing to learn. A fundamental quality of a disciple is that of a learner. And a learner has got to be humble. You can't be an effective teacher, shepherd, or elder without humility. If that's not there, you're sort of spitting into the wind. You're probably not going to make progress with someone who is not really a learner. I would also say love for God and love for people. Somebody has to care about the needs of people.

When asked how he helped others develop these qualities, he said, "I think this goes back to the ordinary means of grace, especially preaching. Christ-centered preaching serves in the normal course of the life of the church as the means by which people develop Christian character."

Stan told me about one of his elders who had initially come to his church from a theologically liberal congregation. This person told Stan that it was his Christ-centered exposition of the Bible that God used to convict him about his pride and anger, and about being a poor spiritual leader at home. It was the consistent message of the gospel coming through each week that brought hope and power for change in this man's life. According to Stan, this person began to sense, over a period of several of years, that God was calling him to serve in a more formal leadership role in the church. After a long period of further study, training, and observation by the elders and congregation, this man was chosen to

serve as an elder. That was ten years ago. Stan said this person has been one of the most faithful, humble, and effective shepherds he has ever seen.

John agreed with Stan, saying the character required of spiritual shepherds is first and foremost humility. “There are guys who have good, sound doctrine. The big question is can they respect others who disagree with them? How does he disagree with his wife? Does he engage those who follow him in winsome ways? And can he be corrected himself without blowing up?” John added, “A love for God’s word is another area that is critical. Also, is that love for God and his Word carried out in a loving way with people?” The primary way John goes about helping people develop humility and love is through his preaching ministry. “Our preaching on Sunday morning certainly emphasizes those traits, not just for leaders, but for everyone. One distinctive of our preaching is that we seek to flesh out of gospel character in our lives.”

As an example of how God is using John’s preaching to produce Christian character in his church members, John said he received an email from one of the leaders of their small group ministry. The person said they could see God working in their life through John’s sermon series on the importance of being an integral part of the church community. This person had been a member of John’s church for sixteen years, and had always been part of a small group. But, for the last year they had been attending their group out of a sense of duty, rather than out of a love for the people of God and a desire to grow in their love for Christ. This person told John that God had used his preaching to bring them to repentance, and to renew their joy and passion for Christ. They said, “God opened my eyes through your sermons to show me the crucial role of community in the Christian life. I no longer see my small group as an obligation, but as a privilege, as a

means of God's grace to me." They concluded the email message by saying how blessed they were to have John as their pastor.

That is the kind of life transformation pastors are praying for and looking for through the ordinary means of grace, especially their preaching. Along with preaching, pastors also rely upon the discipline of prayer to help develop Christian character in people's lives.

Humility and Love Developed Through Prayer

Two of the participants said that prayer played an important role in helping spiritual shepherds develop the character required for that role. Burt said,

The first quality I'm going to say is love. According to the Apostle Paul, you can be a reaming steaming five-point Calvinist, and a Westminster no-exception taking Presbyterian elder, but if you don't have love, you're nothing. An effective shepherd must be humble. He must be a team player. Humility looks like being able to speak with gentleness, the lack of a cock-sure-attitude, the ability to listen to others, and to not exalt yourself above the sinners you are dealing with. I think it looks like patience with people.

In seeking to help his leaders develop these qualities, Burt stated, "The first thing is to pray for those leaders, that Christ will form his character in them. I pray constantly for this. I also call them to see how they're doing, and to pray with them and for them."

In speaking about the character required of a spiritual shepherd, Rick emphasized the absolute necessity of humility, much as Stan did. They both quoted St. Augustine when they were asked about the most important character quality for a spiritual shepherd. Rick observed,

Augustine said the three most important qualities in a shepherd are humility, humility, and humility. The second one would be a love for God and his people. I think humility and love are the most important qualities, because being a shepherd is hard work. It gets more complicated by a focus on self. If I need strokes from other people, then I'm going to use others to get those strokes. So, a shepherd

needs to be selfless. Jesus is our model there; he said, “I am gentle and humble in heart.”

Rick said he relies a lot on prayer to help current and potential leaders develop the qualities of humility and love. He shared how he and the elders meet together monthly and pray, on their knees, for the members by name. Rick said this pattern has continued for the last three years, and as a result of this consistent prayer for the congregation, Rick has seen the elders “take on more of a people mindset as opposed to a problem mindset.” Rick regularly hears from the elders about people in the congregation who are struggling with various issues, and how they are calling and praying for these members. Rick attributes their monthly prayer times together as the means by which this growth has taken place in the lives of the spiritual shepherds in his church.

The ordinary means of grace, particularly prayer, play a central role with pastors seeking to develop the Christ-like character in those called to serve the church as spiritual shepherds.

Humility and Love Developed Through Discipleship in Community

Five of the participants who were interviewed said that in order to help foster Christ-like character in spiritual shepherds, they spend time with current and potential leaders. According to Mark, “Humility comes from being awed by God’s greatness. Humility also comes from recognizing your own sin, that whatever you have has been given to you by God, and that you live by God’s mercy alone.” He said that he seeks to cultivate that humility by engaging in discipling relationships with his leaders. “You know the warp and woof of my ministry is to meet with guys weekly and work through different books together, reflect on Scripture and pray together. We talk about what God is teaching us. This drives my discipleship and opens the door for developing leaders.”

By way of example, Mark told me the story about a man who started attending his church three years into his pastorate. (Mark has now been at his church for twelve years.) This gentleman, whose name is Craig, was an unbeliever when Mark first met him, but was converted to Christ just a few months after being under Mark's preaching. Mark began meeting weekly with Craig to help him grow as a new Christian. He said that Craig began to take on various roles of service in the church, such as ushering, assisting in the children's ministry, showing up on work days to help with maintenance around the church, and just serving anywhere he was needed. Mark said, "After seven years of watching Craig, the elders began discussing the possibility of him serving as an elder." Mark is a Presbyterian pastor, so he began meeting with Craig every Wednesday morning for two hours to work through the Westminster Confession of Faith. They met together for two years.

As a result of their time together Craig shared with Mark that it was during this period that God worked deeply in his heart to "fertilize his devotional life and humble his pride." Mark said he could see a discernible growth of humility in Craig as evidenced by his teachability. When they discussed difficult sections of the Confession, such as the doctrine of election, Mark said, "Craig was willing to listen and learn and grapple with mystery. I could see his humility in his teachability." Mark said the congregation also saw Craig's growth over the years, and he was eventually nominated, elected, and ordained as an elder. Mark said that Craig is the first person in his ministry he has seen move from being an unbeliever to Christian to elder. Mark believes that God used the combined efforts of his preaching, his discipleship of Craig, the elders' involvement in his life, and the congregation's input to bring this about.

Ben said that a shepherd “must be a man of humility. He depends on the Lord, which is humbling. He also must have a love for people. He’s got to have a genuine concern for other people.” He went on to say,

The first thing I try to do in helping someone develop that character is to model it myself in relationship with them and others. They need to see what someone pursuing the love and humility of Christ looks like, not perfectly of course, but they’ve got to see it in me. So, I meet with men and get them into the Word. That gives me an opportunity to get into their lives and see what’s going on. I try to discern where they need to grow. I find that if we use a set curriculum we might miss important areas that need addressing in a man’s life. I think helping people develop character like this is a lot more organic, like on-the-job training.

John noted, “A lot of people want to be leaders for the wrong reasons. Ministry is about loving people. That’s observable by others. You can get people to read books on theology and other topics, but you can’t get them to want to love people. And that’s what ministry is about.” However, John did state that a pastor can create environments to help leaders work on and develop Christian character.

They need to be in community with other Christians. Our community groups create a context where those traits can be learned and evaluated at the same time. This is a context of life-on-life in which a potential leader can grow because other people are getting to know him and they are watching him in all kinds of different situations.

Burt expressed agreement when he said,

One of the best things I do is to practice hospitality with my leaders. I have guys over for breakfast a couple times a month and we just mix it up with each other. We enjoy a good meal, have some good conversation about all kinds of stuff, talk about the Word or some book we’re reading, and then pray for each other. I think this is the most fruitful thing I do in developing guys to be the kind of shepherds we all need to be. Just getting people together builds relational capital. I think this development of leaders best happens in the process of relationships. It pulls men in the direction of personal godliness and it pulls them in the direction of being faithful shepherds of the church. Just the process of doing the work of ministry together helps people grow in grace.

Burt spoke of Jim, an elder in his congregation. He is one of the most theologically astute laypersons with whom Burt has ever served. At the same time, Burt said that Jim was one of the most self-centered and prideful people he has ever known. Over a period of several years, Jim developed some significant health problems and required open-heart surgery in order to save his life. Through his recovery process, Jim experienced deep valleys of depression. In addition, his marriage was in great trouble, and a family member was embezzling thousands of dollars from his business. During all this, Burt was meeting with Jim and other leaders in these bi-monthly breakfast gatherings. As a result, God used the hardships in Jim's life, in the context of loving and supportive relationships with Burt and others, to humble his pride and create in him a heart of compassion for other hurting people in their congregation. Burt says, "Today, Jim is one of the most beloved spiritual shepherds in our church. The transformation in his life has been evident. And I think it's the result of these guys getting together and learning how to love each other well."

The responses to this second research question reveal that preaching, prayer and personal discipling relationships are among the primary strategies pastors use to help spiritual shepherds develop the character qualities necessary for their role.

How Do Pastors Help People Develop the Competencies Required of Spiritual Shepherds?

The third research question asked how pastors help people develop the competencies required of spiritual shepherds. First, they were asked what they considered the most important competencies for spiritual shepherds. Two areas emerged. First, spiritual shepherds must grow in their ability to love people well. And second, spiritual shepherds must develop the skill of being life-long learners. In responding to the question of how they help people develop these competencies, two answers were shared by the

study participants. First, pastors rely on personal discipling relationships with their leaders, in which they seek to model the skills required of a spiritual shepherd. Second, they rely on the means of grace, such as preaching and the community of the church.

Developing the Competency of Loving People

Three of the participants indicated that a core competency that needed to be developed in a spiritual shepherd was the ability to love people. Burt expressed this perspective, and became very emotional when he said, “If we don’t love people, nothing else matters. And when I say that, it indicts me. I mean if there isn’t love for Christ and his church, then nothing else really matters.” When asked what he does to help others develop a love for people, Burt said that he spends time with his leaders, seeking to model the skill of loving people well, even though he will never do it perfectly. He believes that letting his leaders see him fail is part of the development process.

It’s not really formal with us. It’s much more organic, life-on-life stuff that happens, and God is faithful to provide that for us. This is something I can’t do apart from Christ’s Spirit working in me. In all of this we’re in the midst of our own sanctification, being conformed to Jesus’ likeness. There’s a sense in which one of the most helpful things I can do for people is just openly be a partially sanctified sinner who understands the gospel and what to do about his own sin. That way even your own screw-ups get used in a redemptive way. We’ve got to show people that we have the freedom to fail, but they’ve also got the Holy Spirit and they can and will change. They’re not going to be perfect, but they’re going to change.

Burt’s confidence in the power of Christ working through his own failure to love people keeps him working at developing and modeling that trait in his own life. When this modeling is done in the context of a community of relationships, God uses it to develop Christ-like love in the lives of others.

Tom said that loving people is a critical skill for a shepherd to have, and that he also looks to the community of the church to help develop that in people’s lives. He said,

There are relational skills like treating people well—with respect and love. Christian maturity is learning how to listen to and love people well who are completely different from you. When we're talking about developing the skill of loving people, we're talking about wholeness in a person's life. Is there a debris field behind them or are people glad this person is in their life? Is there wholeness in their relationships based upon grace through faith, expressing itself in love? One of the primary ways we seek to develop that in our leaders is through their intentional involvement over the years in the lives of people. This happens in the structure of our church through our network of small groups.

Rick shared how important it is for shepherds to love those who are particularly hard to love.

Shepherds need to have competencies in dealing with people. They need to be able to relate to people who aren't like them. We have some people in our church that are like what William Still called "strange birds." A person who is going to be a spiritual shepherd needs to be able to relate to those kinds of difficult people.

In responding to the question about how he tries to help his leaders develop this competency, Rick stated, "I will ask guys to help me lead a Bible study. They are going to learn how to deal with all kinds of people in that setting. Ongoing mentoring and modeling is happening as I invite them to come along with me and see what I'm doing."

Rick told me about a man in his church named Jerry, whom he asked to help him lead a Bible study that he and his wife were hosting in their home. Debbie, one of the congregation's "strange birds," was attending this Bible study. Rick said that over a period of two years, Jerry took on more of the leadership responsibility of the group, and led the members to care for Debbie in practical ways. As a single mom, Debbie had a five-year-old daughter who was especially difficult to deal with. With Jerry's leadership, Rick said the group helped Debbie with babysitting, parenting skills, financial assistance, and home repairs. Rick said that as he mentored Jerry over a period of time, he saw the love of Christ growing in Jerry's life, especially for difficult people like Debbie.

Ben said that he and his wife have tried to model what it means to love others by having people in their home a lot, so others can see what their marriage looks like. Ben said that how he treats his wife is a reflection of how he will treat his flock. So, part of his developing people for spiritual leadership is to let them see him at home, interacting with his family in an unstructured context. Ben indicated that this kind of intentional modeling has been an encouragement to others.

The methodology of developing spiritual leaders varies from pastor to pastor. There is no single programmatic approach. However, that does not mean that these pastors are not thinking and planning and designing structures for developing leaders. Rather, there is no set curriculum that pastors are relying upon. Rather, pastors develop spiritual shepherds through their regular work of personal discipleship and with the help of the congregation's observations.

Developing the Competency of Life-Long Learning

Five of the participants said that a spiritual shepherd needs to practice the skill of being a life-long learner. Four of the pastors said they spend significant time with people they are seeking to develop as spiritual shepherds in order to develop this skill. For example, Tom said,

I think there must be a skill in learning how to stay fresh in the gospel. I call this gospel-renewal dynamics, because it's the skill of being able to continually preach the gospel to your heart and be renewed by God's grace. That's a life-long skill every Christian should know how to do, but especially a spiritual leader. I try to help guys do that by showing them how it works in my life.

One way Tom does that is by regularly incorporating his interns and elders and other ministry leaders in his weekly sermon preparation. This allows them to see how Tom "preaches the gospel to himself" and how he tries to apply it to the life of the

congregation. It also provides an opportunity for these leaders to grow in their ability to understand, apply, and teach the Bible.

Mark's conviction and practice is similar to Tom's. He said,

Spiritual leaders must be able to preach the gospel to themselves—to apply the balm of Gilead to their own souls. If they can't do that, they won't be able to do it for others. So, when it's not happening in their own lives, then I know they're not doing it with others in the flock. You just have to spend time with guys to watch for that.

Mark shared that in the last couple of years he and his elders had to work through a rough time in their relationships with each other. He said, "My elders didn't know that I loved them. And the reason they thought that way is because I didn't spend time with them outside of our regular meetings." Mark said that as a result of their honesty with each other, and especially with him, they all began to repent of selfishness and pride, and are now experiencing a renewed joy on the elder team. He said, "The blessings we are now enjoying are directly related to the repentance and trust we have experienced with each other." He went on to say, "We are spending more social time together, and getting into each other's world a little more. It's that 1 Thessalonians thing of sharing our lives with one another."

Burt expressed the conviction that spiritual leaders need to be continual learners, when he said,

It's hard for me to see how someone could remain a viable leader who isn't reading continually and growing intellectually. Being a life-long learner is necessary to effective leadership. I think, for example, that for a leader to be continually aware of where our culture is at spiritually and morally is really helpful.

When asked how he seeks to develop the competency of being a learner in those called to be spiritual shepherds, Burt said he seeks to model those skills in his own life.

He accomplishes this modeling through spending personal time with his leaders in various settings. “Probably the thing I try to do more than anything else is just model for people what it looks like to follow Christ in the details of life. And spending time with the men helps them see that more than just what they see on Sunday mornings.” For example, to help his leaders develop the ministry skill of hospital visitation, whenever Burt does a hospital visit he tries to get one of his elders to go with him. To help them develop the skill of interpreting and teaching the Bible, he asks them to work with him in putting together Bible studies and sermons. He is also constantly inviting people to read and discuss books with him. These and other avenues provide opportunities for Burt to develop leaders in his church who are learners.

Ben was another participant who believed it was important to develop spiritual shepherds as continual learners through modeling. He said, “I’m looking for people who want to learn more about God and his Word and how to apply that to the flock. A shepherd has got to be constantly growing in that area if they are going to bring others along with them. I don’t think this happens in five easy steps. I think it’s more organic, life-on-life kind of stuff.” Ben’s approach in helping others develop the skills for spiritual shepherding is to model what it means to be a lover of people and a continual learner. One of the ways he tries to put that conviction into practice is by frequently having people visit in his home. “We don’t have kids, so it’s easier for us than some. We want people to see what Christian marriage looks like, with all its joys and hardships, and that we are still learning how it works.”

Stan expressed a similar conviction about spiritual shepherds needing to grow as learners. However, he placed more emphasis on the use of the means of grace, namely,

the regular teaching and preaching ministry of the church. Stan expressed his perspective when he said,

I think that a person needs to be growing in how to study the Bible for themselves and learning how to think theologically about problems and questions and issues. That applies globally to the broader church and locally to the personal problems of church members. This requires some intellectual ability. I think that ability is cultivated and developed through the ordinary means of grace such as preaching, Sunday school classes, and Bible studies. God will use these ordinary means, which he has appointed for his church, to help people discern their calling, and to develop their character and gifts for ministry.

As an example of how God has worked this out in his experience, Stan told about a young man in his church who expressed a desire to learn more about the Bible and reformed theology. Stan met with this man for about a year, reading and discussing books and studying the Bible together. As a result, Stan saw growth in this person's understanding and application of God's grace in his life, particularly in the area of his temper. This discipling relationship eventually led to this person being asked to lead a small group Bible study. The people in that Bible study have been very encouraged by this man's leadership. Stan believes at some point it is very likely this person will be asked to serve as an elder in their church. As encouraging as that situation has been, the development of leaders is a long and difficult task.

Summary of Findings

Stan concluded our interview with this observation about the difficult task of developing spiritual shepherds:

This whole thing about developing leaders seems to be a struggle for all of us pastors. I don't know what that says, but I'm not persuaded that there's a mechanical solution that we're missing. We have talked a lot about that as elders at our church. We recognize that we live in a really challenging spiritual environment, and sometimes we don't realize how bad it is. The American church and culture is not a place that nurtures Christian maturity. It's an increasingly raw,

pagan environment. This environment seems to create real challenges to developing leaders.

Stan said that over the last twelve years, he and his elders have worked hard at developing new leaders. However, often times when he and the elders have believed someone is ready to take on the role of spiritual shepherd, the person in question doesn't agree that they are ready. He said there have also been times when someone believes they are ready, but the elders do not. These situations have been disappointing and frustrating. Stan's frustration represents the sentiments of all the participants interviewed for this study as they reflected on the sobering and challenging responsibility of developing spiritual shepherds to care for Christ's church. They all find it a great challenge with which they constantly struggle. As Stan so eloquently put it, "This whole thing about developing leaders seems to be a struggle for all of us pastors. I don't know what that says, but I'm not persuaded that there's a mechanical solution that we're missing."

There are no easy answers. Leadership development is hard work and pastors find it one of the greatest challenges of their ministry. However, there are several common practices observed among the pastors interviewed. In order to help people discern a calling to spiritual shepherding, and to help them develop the necessary character and competencies for that role, pastors rely on personal discipling relationships, the ordinary means of grace God has established for the church, and the community of the church to observe and validate particular qualities in emerging spiritual shepherds.

In this chapter, the participants for this study were introduced and the data from the interviews conducted with them was analyzed according to the constant comparative method discussed in chapter three. The pastors were asked a number of questions in order to discern how they go about developing spiritual shepherds for their churches. What

emerged from the interviews with the pastors was a process that may appear to be somewhat unstructured, but is actually an intentional method for leadership development. In order to help people discern God's calling to serve as a spiritual shepherd, and to help them develop the character and competencies required for that role, pastors initiate personal discipling relationships, use and rely upon the ordinary means of grace, and look to the community of the church to help them observe and validate specific qualities in emerging spiritual shepherds. In chapter five, these findings will be discussed in greater detail, along with the implications for ministry practice. Also, several themes relevant to the topic of leadership development will be recommended for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors develop spiritual shepherds for the local church. This study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. How do pastors help people discern a calling to serve as spiritual shepherds?
2. How do pastors help people develop the character required of spiritual shepherds?
3. How do pastors help people develop the competencies necessary for effective spiritual shepherding?

In order to answer these questions, several areas of literature were reviewed in chapter two: biblical-theological, calling, the character and competencies of spiritual shepherds, and the learning process of spiritual shepherds. Then seven interviews were conducted with pastors who have served in pastoral ministry for ten years or longer. Their insights concerning the research questions were reported and analyzed in chapter four. In this chapter, the findings from the literature review and the interviews will be summarized, after which conclusions will be drawn and recommendations for further study suggested.

While there has been much written on the nature and importance of spiritual leadership, the literature reviewed in this study revealed very little about how pastors actually go about the practice of developing leadership for the local church. This study was an attempt to provide at least a few answers to that question, both for those just beginning their pastoral ministries, and for seasoned pastors who find identifying and developing effective spiritual shepherds one of the unique challenges of their ministry.

The literature review and the interviews demonstrate that there is no “magic bullet” for developing spiritual shepherds. There is no single program that pastors can adopt which will automatically produce the kind of leaders a Christian congregation needs. As Herrington, Creech, and Taylor discovered, “In our experience, those who achieve change do not embrace a formula or a program. They commit to a process that provides simple guidance in the midst of the complexity of seeking personal transformation.”¹⁹⁴ The process of identifying, developing, and maintaining biblically qualified spiritual shepherds is a much more fluid and organic than programmatic process. However, the work that pastors do in developing leadership is not haphazard. The interviews reflect that they are intentional about this work.

After analyzing the literature review and the interview responses, it is my conclusion that pastors develop spiritual shepherds for the local church in at least three ways. First, pastors establish personal discipling relationships with those they are seeking to develop as spiritual shepherds. Second, pastors rely upon the ordinary means of grace, namely the ministry of the word of God and prayer. And third, pastors look to the community of the church to help them observe, validate, and foster the calling, character, and competencies being evidenced in the lives of emerging spiritual shepherds. It can be argued that these three areas—personal discipling relationships, the means of grace, and the help of the church community—are the basic strategies pastors employ in developing spiritual shepherds.

¹⁹⁴ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 145.

Discussion of Findings

Personal Discipling Relationships

The literature review and the interviews showed that God gives a specific calling to people for the ministry of spiritual shepherding. However, discerning that call is not a simple process. There are various ways in which individuals come to an awareness of God's call on their lives to serve as spiritual shepherds. For example, the literature showed that one of the indicators that a person is called to be a spiritual shepherd is that "God moves in the hearts of potential leaders to equip them with a passion to lead and a selfless sense of calling to be a leader."¹⁹⁵ Martyn Lloyd-Jones described this sense of calling as "God acting upon you by His Spirit. It is something you become aware of rather than what you do."¹⁹⁶ The interviews revealed that in order to help discern that sense of calling in a person's life, pastors spend time engaging in personal discipling relationships with the potential leaders. Mark, one of the pastors interviewed, said "Well, I don't know any other way to help a guy discern that call apart from time spent with the person." John said, "I spend a lot of time with them to discern whether a person is really interested in serving the church or just being served by the church."

Personal discipleship should be at the heart of every pastor's ministry. So much of our work as pastors is people work. We listen to their struggles, share in the joys and sorrows of their lives, and give them spiritual direction. This is the way Jesus went about developing his disciples. He, the Chief Shepherd, spent a lot of time with them in various settings and under different circumstances. We are Christ's undershepherds, called to follow in his steps. Therefore, we are to be personally involved in the lives of those we

¹⁹⁵ Reeder and Gragg, 55.

¹⁹⁶ Lloyd-Jones, 104.

serve, especially those we are seeking to develop as leaders. Engaging in personal discipling relationships is one of the means by which we can help people discern whether God is calling them to spiritual leadership, and therefore, one of the ways we can help develop faithful spiritual shepherds for the local church.

Both the literature and the interviews agreed that humility and love were two of the most important character qualities that spiritual shepherds must possess. Oswald Sanders said that “Humility is the hallmark of the spiritual leader.”¹⁹⁷ The apostle Peter exhorted everyone in his congregation to “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”¹⁹⁸ Not only are spiritual shepherds to be humble, but they must also be marked by love— a love for God and a love for people. Jesus taught that all the Law and the Prophets hang on the two commandments to love God and to love one’s neighbor. Love is the mark of the Christian.

The literature had a lot to say about the importance and nature of humility and love, but when it came to practical strategies for pastors to help develop these qualities in leaders, the extra-biblical literature was virtually silent. It was the interviews with the pastors that revealed how they rely on personal discipling relationships to help cultivate Christ-like character in current and potential spiritual shepherds. Mark said, “Humility comes by being awed by God’s greatness and by recognizing your own sin. The way I try to help develop that in others is that I just meet with guys weekly. We work through different books together, reflect on Scripture and pray together, and talk about what God is teaching us.” Ben said that he tries to help develop humility and love in others by

¹⁹⁷ Sanders, 61.

¹⁹⁸ 1 Peter 5:5-6.

modeling it in relationship with them. “They’ve got to see this in me. So, I meet with them one-on-one and get into their lives to discern where they need to grow.” Ben and his wife also have people in their home. “We don’t have kids, so it’s easier for us. We want people to see what Christian marriage looks like, with all its joys and hardships.” And Tom placed a high priority on personal discipleship when he said, “I just spend a lot of time with guys. I disciple several small groups of guys, trying to help them get the gospel worked into their hearts.”

Leadership is primarily about influence. As Walter Wright puts it, leadership “is a relationship of influence in which the leader seeks to influence the behavior, attitudes, vision, values or beliefs of another.”¹⁹⁹ To influence people toward spiritual maturity, a shepherd must be an example to them of Christ-likeness. One of the primary ways pastors seek to foster this influence by example is through engaging in personal discipling relationships. Mark’s story about Craig, who became a Christian under his preaching and was eventually ordained as an elder, illustrates the power and effectiveness of a pastor’s personal involvement in people’s lives.

As I listened to these pastors share their philosophy of ministry, their models sounded very similar to the one Jesus put forward in the Gospels. Jesus regularly spent time with his disciples, teaching them, reflecting with them about what they were learning, and modeling for them the character he wanted them to develop. One of the most vivid ways he did this was by stooping down to wash their feet. In doing so, he was giving pastors a paradigm of how to help others develop the character necessary for spiritual shepherding.

¹⁹⁹ Wright, 31.

The literature and the interviews showed that spiritual shepherds must possess certain skills and competencies in order to be effective in their work. The consensus of the literature was that the most important competencies for spiritual shepherds include feeding, leading, and caring for the flock. The interviews with the pastors, however, revealed the most important competencies for spiritual shepherds are being able to love people well, and being life-long learners. The Bible tells us that an elder “must be apt to teach.”²⁰⁰ This ability to feed the flock the word of God is essential to the task of shepherding.

Alexander Strauch says, “The Bible is to be the spiritual shepherd’s continual course of study. The Bible is God’s complete training manual for all spiritual leaders. A leader who does not know the Bible is like a shepherd without legs; he can’t lead or protect the flock.”²⁰¹ The pastors who were interviewed agreed with Strauch. They said that a shepherd needs to be able to teach, but in order to do that, they need to be life-long learners of God’s word. For example, Ben said, “I’m looking for people who want to learn more about God and his word and how to apply that to the flock.” As Tom said, “There must be a skill in learning how to stay fresh in the gospel. That’s a life-long skill every Christian should know how to do, but especially a spiritual leader.” Tom tries to help his leaders grow in that skill by showing them how it works in his life. One way he does that is by regularly involving his interns, elders, and other leaders in his sermon preparation. This allows them to see how Tom disciplines himself with the gospel and how he tries to apply it to the life of the congregation. It also provides an opportunity for these leaders to grow in their ability to understand, apply, and teach the Bible.

²⁰⁰ 1 Timothy 3:2.

²⁰¹ Strauch, 80.

Burt expressed his conviction that shepherds must be learners when he said, “It’s hard for me to see how someone could remain a viable leader who isn’t reading continually and growing intellectually. Being a life-long learner is necessary to effective leadership.” Then Burt added, “Probably the thing I try to do more than anything else is just model for people what being a learner looks like in the details of life. Spending time with them helps them see that more clearly than just what they see on Sunday mornings.” To foster this learning through modeling, Burt tries to take one of his elders with him when he does hospital visitations. He also lets elders help him put together Bible studies and sermons. Burt is an avid reader, so he is constantly inviting his leaders to read and discuss books with him. These and other avenues provide opportunities for Burt to develop spiritual shepherds in his church who are continual learners.

Some of the literature on adult learning showed that there is a process by which adults learn that results in life change. Herrington, Creech, and Taylor argue that “those who achieve change do not embrace a formula or a program. They commit to a process that provides simple guidance in the midst of the complexity of seeking personal transformation. This process is a continuous cycle of information, practice, and reflection.”²⁰² The guidance for this process of transformation is what pastors give their people in their personal discipling relationships.

What I have gleaned from the research is that whether pastors are trying to help people discern a calling from God to serve as spiritual shepherds, or working with them to develop the character and competencies required of spiritual shepherds, they spend a lot of time with those they are trying to cultivate as leaders of the congregation. They read and discuss Scripture and other books together. They pray with people. They have

²⁰² Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 145.

people in their homes, seeking to model what a sinful but grace-filled leader looks like. This is the pattern Jesus established in his incarnation and earthly ministry. Our covenant-making, covenant-keeping God chose to establish a personal discipling relationship with his people. The Word became flesh, John says, and pitched his tent among us. If this is how our Chief Shepherd chose to carry out his ministry, it only makes sense that his undershepherds would do their work in like manner.

The Ordinary Means of Grace

The means of grace refer to the instruments God has ordained by which people come to faith in Christ, and by which they are nurtured in their faith. The ordinary means, or instruments, of grace are the word of God, prayer, and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The literature, but especially the interviews with pastors, reveals that pastors rely on the means of preaching and prayer, which God uses in the lives of people to call and equip them as spiritual shepherds for a local church. For example, in his book *Working the Angles*, Eugene Peterson says, "Three pastoral acts are so basic, so critical, that they determine the shape of everything else. The acts are prayer, reading Scripture and giving spiritual direction."²⁰³ Personal discipling relationships, along with the ministry of the word of God and prayer, play critical roles in pastoral work. They determine the shape of the entire ministry of a church, including that of development of spiritual leaders. That is why the apostle Paul told Timothy that a shepherd "must hold firmly to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it."²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Peterson, 2.

²⁰⁴ Titus 1:9.

The primacy of the ministry of the word and prayer in the life of the early church is evidenced by the believers devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to prayer. When Paul charged Timothy to train up men as leaders in the church, he emphasized the means of grace. "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching."²⁰⁵ Timothy was to practice these spiritual disciplines so that others in the church could see his growth and progress in the faith. So, the high priority God places on these means of grace, especially the word and prayer, ought to be instructive for pastors in how they go about the process of developing spiritual shepherds for Christ's church.

The importance of the means of grace in developing spiritual shepherds was emphasized by the pastors in the interviews. In relation to helping people discern a call to spiritual shepherding, Stan said his regular pulpit ministry was a central factor. "In the context of the life of the church, there's the regular preaching ministry which covers topics such as calling, and particularly calling to the offices of the church." Burt agreed when he said that God would work in people's lives through the weekly ministry of the word. "I think in just the regular course of the preaching and teaching ministry of the church, God is working in people's lives to stir up that call to serve and use their gifts."

When asked how pastors help people develop the character and the competencies required of spiritual shepherds, the participants again said that preaching played a primary role. John stated that, "One distinctive of our preaching is that we seek to flesh out of gospel character in our lives." John mentioned an email he received from one of his church members who was a leader in their small groups ministry. In the email, the person said they could see God working in their life through John's sermons on the

²⁰⁵ 1 Timothy 4:13.

importance of being part of a community group. They said that God had used John's preaching to open their eyes to the crucial role of community in the Christian life. And they concluded the email message by saying how blessed they were to have John as their pastor.

Burt shared the story about Allen, a life-long church member, coming to faith in Christ through his preaching, even while Allen was serving as a deacon. Allen told Burt that although he had heard many sermons over the years, it was Burt's consistent preaching of the gospel that God used in Allen's life to bring him to repentance, and eventually to call him to serve as an elder. Stan's conviction about the importance of preaching in developing spiritual shepherds was stated this way: "The ordinary means of grace, especially Christ-centered preaching, serves in the normal course of the life of the church as the way God has appointed for his church to help people discern their calling, and to develop their character and gifts for ministry." One of Stan's elders had come from a theologically liberal church, and told him that it was Stan's weekly exposition of the Bible that God used to convict him about his pride and being a poor spiritual leader at home. It was the consistent Christ-centered message from Stan that brought hope and power for change in this man's life. Over a period of a couple of years, God began to call this person to serve in a more formal role as a spiritual shepherd. Stan told me this man has been one of the most faithful and effective shepherds he has ever seen. Preaching is not only how God builds Christian leaders, it is how he builds Christians. We come to faith through the preaching of the gospel, as Craig did under Mark's preaching, and we become more like Christ through the preaching of the gospel, as did the elder in Stan's

church. Faithful preaching of the gospel is how God intends for pastors to develop spiritual shepherds for the local church.

Not only is preaching essential to the task of developing leaders, but so is prayer. As Eugene Peterson has noted, prayer is one of the basic acts of pastoral ministry. Several of the study participants mentioned its importance in their work of leadership development. When discussing how to help people discern a calling to spiritual leadership, Ben said, “I begin with prayer. I am looking for people who have that vision of prayer, which brings the power of God in the church. Even if God doesn’t move and raise up leaders, we still need to depend on him and wait on him in prayer.” Ben felt that even if the church had only a few people who “were hungry to grow in their walk with God, which begins with prayer, then that would have a tremendous impact on the healthy growth of the church.” He has seen this happen in some small ways in his church. After establishing a monthly congregational prayer meeting, and then calling for special days of prayer and fasting, Ben has witnessed the grace of God working powerfully in the lives of a couple of men, whom he initially perceived as spiritually cold. Since they have been praying together, they have expressed a desire to meet with Ben for more in-depth discipling. This direct answer to Ben’s personal prayers, as well as the corporate prayers of the congregation, has been particularly encouraging to Ben and his church.

In talking about developing Christian character in people, Burt said, “The first thing is to pray specifically for those leaders, that Christ will form his character in them. I pray constantly for this, in my own time with the Lord, and when I’m with my leaders.” And Rick added, “With my leaders, we meet and pray together. We pray for each other and we pray for every person in the flock.” Rick told me how he and his elders spend an

hour on their knees at their monthly meetings, praying for each member of the congregation. He said this practice has resulted in the elders developing a great love for and sensitivity to the needs of the congregation. Rick said their prayer time together has led to his elders “becoming more people-minded than problem-minded.”

The preaching of the word of God and prayer are the two turbine engines that God uses to cause his church to move forward, and to bear fruit in every age. Jesus promised that he would build his church on the rock of the Father’s revelation of the Son to the apostles. This revelation of Jesus has come down to us in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Scripture is the rock upon which Christ establishes and nourishes his church. The preached word of God is what he uses to call and develop Christian leaders to serve his church as his undershepherds.

If the word of God is like a sword that penetrates the hearts of people to call them to Christ and then into spiritual leadership, then prayer is the hand which takes hold of that sword and wields its power with people. God has ordained that preaching be the means of grace by which he develops spiritual shepherds in the local church. But he has also ordained that the effectiveness of that word rests upon the prayers of his people. So, in order to raise up called and gifted spiritual shepherds who will care for, feed, and lead God’s sheep, pastors must take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and wield it with prayer. This is the strategy God has ordained for developing spiritual shepherds in the local church.

The Church Community

The literature made it plain that leaders are developed by means of being observed, affirmed, and encouraged by the community of the church. As Lawrence Eyres

put it, “God makes men elders, and the church’s duty is to discern which men God has given to the church.”²⁰⁶ Or, as Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie discovered from their research on the self-care of pastors, “It isn’t hardships themselves that provide leadership training, but hardships experienced in a supportive context with the opportunity to review the experience.”²⁰⁷ In other words, the community of the church is one of God’s primary contexts in which spiritual shepherds are developed.

The early days of the church reveal the importance of the community of the saints in identifying its leaders. As the infant Jerusalem church was growing rapidly, the apostles could no longer keep up with the demands of all the people and still give their attention to teaching the word of God and praying. So, they asked the community of believers to choose for themselves several men who were known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. The apostles would confer upon these men the task of caring for the widows. This idea pleased the whole congregation, and they chose for themselves seven men whom the apostles set apart for this diaconal work. As a result, “the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”²⁰⁸ It was the community of the church who observed and affirmed the calling and gifting of these leaders.

After Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, when Matthias was chosen to replace Judas, it was the gathered congregation which confirmed that choice. Paul reminded Timothy of the church’s confirmation of his ministry when he wrote, “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their

²⁰⁶ Eyres., 7.

²⁰⁷ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, 203-204.

²⁰⁸ Acts 6:7.

hands on you.”²⁰⁹ The affirmation of the church does not add anything to God’s call, but gives more evidence that the Spirit is at work in a man’s life to make him a spiritual shepherd. Charles Spurgeon affirmed this by saying, “The will of the Lord concerning pastors (spiritual shepherds) is made known through the prayerful judgment of His church.” This is a great comfort to pastors who are in the trenches trying to identify and raise up leaders who will help tend the flock of God. There is freedom in knowing that our sovereign God will provide shepherds for his people, and will let his sheep know who those shepherds are.

The pastors who were interviewed for this study said they rely very much on the community of the church to help them identify and develop potential spiritual shepherds. John said, “One of the things I stress is that if a person is called, the people around them will recognize it. Their life will show that they love the church. And people will want to follow them.” Stan told about one of his elders who originally did not think he was qualified to serve. However, people in the congregation were continually seeking counsel from this man and were being effectively helped by him. Over time, it became obvious to the elders and the congregation that this man was called and gifted by God to serve as one of their spiritual shepherds. He was eventually nominated, elected, and ordained as an elder.

Tom made the point that when he planted the church, there was set in place an intentional process by which the members of the congregation would have many avenues through service opportunities, small groups, and Sunday school classes to observe whether someone was called and gifted to serve as a spiritual shepherd. “In our church, there are going to be people around you who can observe whether or not you are qualified

²⁰⁹ 1 Timothy 4:14.

and ready to lead. Our whole system as a church has been keyed to look for spiritual leaders from the beginning.”

God has established the communion of saints, that is the body of Christ, as one of the means by which he enables pastors to identify and develop spiritual shepherds who will assist in the feeding, leading, and caring of the flock.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors develop spiritual shepherds for the local church. I chose this topic based upon my own frustrations and failures in trying to develop effective spiritual leadership for the church I pastor. I was particularly interested in what other pastors were doing to identify and develop the people in their congregations to serve as faithful spiritual shepherds who would not simply hold an office in the church and serve as policy makers on a board, but rather, who would connect deeply with fellow sinners in the congregation and help lead them to spiritual health and maturity in Christ. I had an unspoken expectation that I would discover a secret strategy that other pastors knew about, but that I had somehow missed. This secret strategy would be “the key” to solving the problem of developing faithful shepherds for the congregation.

However, as a result of my research, especially the interviews with the pastors, I realized that I am not alone. There is a frustration among pastors in trying to groom people for spiritual leadership in the church. This frustration was echoed in the literature as well. For example, Tim Witmer noted the alarming number of pastors who leave their churches and ministries every year due to burnout. He said, “Might not one of the contributing factors be that they are not receiving the help they need in shepherding the

flock prescribed in the Scriptures?”²¹⁰ Pastors are tired of doing the work of shepherding alone. They long for a team of people with whom they can share the joyful burden of caring for God’s people.

I also realized there is a strategy to doing this work, but it is no secret. God has clearly revealed the strategy in the scriptures. God has already given leaders to the church as gifts to his people. But, he has not dropped them out of heaven into the laps of pastors, fully called, qualified, and gifted for service in the church, like fresh recruits out of boot camp. God has ordained a process for the identification and development of the spiritual shepherds he has given the church. The findings of this research show that God’s process entails pastors spending a lot of time with the current and potential leaders in personal discipling relationships. It involves pastors faithfully making use of the ordinary means of grace, especially preaching and prayer. God’s process for developing leaders involves the participation of the whole church community, observing and confirming a person’s calling, character, and competencies to serve as a spiritual shepherd.

The development of spiritual shepherds for the local church is neither a simple or easy process. All of the pastors who participated in this study find developing spiritual shepherds a great challenge with which they constantly struggle. As Stan so eloquently put it, “This whole thing about developing leaders seems to be a struggle for all of us pastors. I don’t know what that says, but I’m not persuaded that there’s a mechanical solution that we’re missing.” Stan’s comment, perhaps more than anything else, summarizes the answer to the question posed for this study. Pastors do not develop spiritual shepherds for the local church by a mechanical process. Rather, it is a long, often frustratingly slow process that entails years of investing in significant discipling

²¹⁰ Witmer, 43-44.

relationships with people, teaching them the word of God, praying with them and for them, and doing all of this within the context of the very ordinary life of the church community.

As we read the Gospels, we discover that this process is exactly how Jesus trained and prepared his disciples as the apostolic foundation of the church. He spent time with them in the ordinary routines of daily life. They fished together, ate together, and did ministry together. He modeled for them the character and competencies he wanted to develop in them. He taught them the word of God, and showed them how to teach others. He prayed for them and with them, actively modeling a praying life. He did this for three years in community with them. There was no mechanical or technical program in which Jesus enrolled his disciples. Rather, through the process of being with them, teaching them, and reflecting on their experiences together, Jesus developed these men into the spiritual shepherds his church would need. This is the process which has been passed down to us by his Spirit in the scriptures.

The agrarian metaphors of shepherding, farming, sowing, tilling, pruning, and harvesting are not merely cultural metaphors of the spiritual life and development of believers, but controlling metaphors for all times and cultures—even our highly technological and pragmatically driven culture. In other words, the work of developing spiritual shepherds is shepherding work. We tend the flock of Christ through many years of discipling people, countless hours of teaching them the word, and innumerable prayers uttered with and for them, all with the help of the church community. And while we work, we wait, looking to God to bear his fruit in people's lives. It is very organic work, versus the mechanistic process our hearts and culture seem to demand. The necessity of

bucking our cultural expectations is one reason why this work of developing spiritual shepherds for the church is so challenging.

Yet, with all of its challenges, frustrations, heartaches, and failures, developing spiritual shepherds is the work to which God has called pastors. And it is a glorious work. There is much about which to be encouraged. With all the slowness of growth in people's lives, and with all the defections of false shepherds, the chief Shepherd has promised to build his church. He is using weak and sinful pastors to love his sheep and to sow his gospel into their lives until he returns. And when the chief Shepherd does return, those who have served him "willingly and eagerly, as examples to the flock, will receive the unfading crown of glory."²¹¹

Recommendations for Practice

As a result of this study, I recommend my fellow pastors establish a bi-monthly meeting with a small group of other like-minded pastors with whom they can share their lives. Pastors need the safe harbor of fellowship with other pastors who are facing the same challenges. The purpose of the first meeting is social in nature, sharing a meal together, sharing what God is doing in their lives, discussing what books they are reading, and what they are experiencing in their churches at that particular time. The second meeting is for the purpose of praying for one another. I have found this time with my brothers to be a great encouragement in my personal growth as a Christian, and in my development as a spiritual shepherd of Christ's church.

Second, I recommend that pastors establish some type of monthly training opportunity for the congregation, in which they can receive instruction on spiritual leadership in the church. As a result of this study, I have initiated a monthly gathering in

²¹¹ 1 Peter 5:2-4.

our church that I call “Leadership Community.” All the members of our church, but especially our small group leaders, are encouraged to participate and be equipped with the necessary information and skills for effective leadership. This gathering begins with an informal pizza dinner. Afterwards, I teach for forty-five minutes on some aspect of biblical leadership, and we conclude the time by praying for one another around the tables.

Third, I recommend that pastors establish a weekly discipling relationship with specific people in their congregations whom they perceive to be potential leaders. This should be by invitation only and limited to three or four people. As a result of this study, I have asked three men to begin meeting with me early on Tuesday mornings. The purpose of these gatherings is to share God’s word together, to reflect on and learn from our life experiences, and to pray for one another. Over a period of years, I believe God will use these gatherings as one of the means of producing faithful spiritual shepherds for our congregation.

Further Research

One of the areas I would recommend exploring further is the impact of suffering on the development of spiritual shepherds. With the exception of the Bible, most of the literature did not mention hardship as a means of developing spiritual shepherds. Not one of the pastors interviewed for this study specifically mentioned hardship as a means by which God develops spiritual shepherds. However, hardships are one of the most, if not the most, significant tools in developing spiritual leaders according to the work of Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie outlined in their book *Resilient Ministry*. Yet it is not just the hardships themselves, but reflecting on those situations with a safe

and trusted group of friends that yields spiritual growth in people. I believe that further study on this topic would yield very helpful insights for the field of leadership development in general, but especially spiritual leadership for the local church.

Related to the topic of hardships is that of discouragement in ministry. One of the reasons pastors leave their churches (and ministry altogether) is due to the discouragement of feeling alone in their work. Many pastors have had the disheartening experience of a promising ministry leader not following through on their commitment to shepherd the flock. Pastors have had those with whom they serve turn on them in anger and betrayal. These and other painful experiences in ministry have led pastors into periods of deep discouragement, and to the decision to leave the ministry for other work. Therefore, a helpful research topic would be to address the question of how pastors deal with discouragement resulting from unmet expectations in leadership development.

I also would recommend further study on the topic of calling. Most of the literature reviewed for this study focused on the calling of vocational pastors as opposed to the calling of non-vocational shepherds. It is my conviction that God's call to the ministry, whether as a vocation or as a layperson, is the same. However, the literature tends to put more emphasis and significance on the calling of vocational pastors. Historically, the church has tended to approach the subject of calling based on what a person does, rather than on how God has gifted them to serve him in the kingdom. It would be an excellent research topic to consider the subject of calling from the perspective of gifting.

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors develop spiritual shepherds for the local church. In chapter one, we learned that the health and vitality of the church

depends upon the health and vitality of its leaders. Therefore, the development of spiritual shepherds for the flock of God is one of the most important aspects of a pastor's calling.

In chapter two we reviewed the literature on developing spiritual shepherds, which focused on calling, character, competencies, and the learning process. We discovered that a calling from God, affirmed by the body of Christ, is essential to effective a shepherding ministry in a congregation. The literature also revealed that along with a divine calling, certain character qualities and competencies are required of those who would lead God's people. The literature on adult learning showed how spiritual shepherds are developed by their experiences, especially by reflecting on their hardships in the context of a safe and supportive community.

In chapter three the qualitative research methodology of this study was examined. Because the purpose of this study was to understand a process, qualitative research permitted the researcher to gain a better understanding of how the pastors interviewed went about the task of developing spiritual shepherds for their churches.

In chapter four the seven pastors were introduced and the data from their interviews was presented and analyzed. Through those interviews, we discovered that pastors develop spiritual shepherds through the strategy of establishing personal discipling relationships, making use of the ordinary means of grace, especially preaching and prayer, and by soliciting the help of the congregation in observing and confirming those whom God is calling to the role of spiritual shepherd.

In chapter five, the findings of the literature and interviews were discussed, conclusions were drawn, and recommendations for ministry practice and further study

were offered. The summary of this study is that the development of spiritual shepherds for the local church is an essential element of the pastor's role. It is neither a simple nor easy process. Instead it is a long, often frustratingly slow process that entails years of investing in personal discipling relationships with people, teaching them the word of God, praying with and for them, and doing this within the context of the common life of the church community.

As this study concludes, it is my prayer that pastors will make finding and developing divinely called, spiritually qualified, and gifted spiritual shepherds for the local church an integral part of their work. It is an urgent need for every generation of God's people. The great hope and encouragement we have as we go about this task is that the risen, ascended Chief Shepherd of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ, has purchased his church with his blood, and promised that he will build his church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

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