



1 Thessalonians 2:1-11

The Call Committee continues to receive and evaluate applicants. I really appreciate the time and effort they continue to put into this vital ministry. One potential candidate grew up in Watertown, WI and was visiting his family over Christmas. Two days after Christmas they decided to take a trip over to check out Viroqua, so we met with them for a bit. While was sat in Kickapoo Coffee, he asked a great but simple question. “How has the church been able to grow as much as it has.” We’re not exactly a megachurch but god has allowed us some measure of growth over the years. The candidate seemed to think that we were doing pretty good for a church our size.

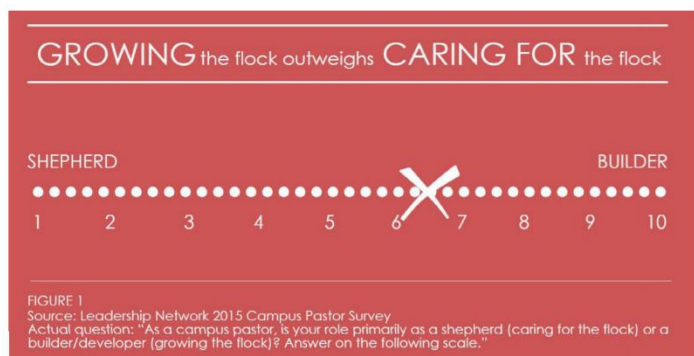
How do you answer a question like that? So I said, Well the preaching is awfully good.” 😊 No, I didn’t say that. I said that God has been very kind to us and that it’s certainly not due to our n



our skill and charm. But we have done some things pretty well and one of them is that we have aimed at healthy leadership. But what does that even look like? As a pastor, I get a lot of emails and advertisements for the latest and greatest leadership fix. Many of them look something like this. “Why the Church Needs More Spiritual Entrepreneurs, Not Shepherds.” Here’s the heart of that article. So here’s my challenge ... why don’t you tap an entrepreneur you know on the

shoulder today and ask him or her, “Have you ever considered ministry?”¹

Here’s another one. “Growing the flock outweighs shepherding the flock.” What do you think about that sentiment? Now in fairness to this, I have seen many pastors who don’t seem to have any vision where they are headed. They just



sort of show up, do church programs and call it shepherding. I think these two emphases are aimed at that sort of pastor. But which one is worse—the pastor with no goals or vision or the one who has grandiose ideas about building a megachurch at all costs?

The Bible is filled with examples of good leadership and bad leadership. I think the Biblical ideal is shepherd leadership. It's about the heart and shepherding others, but it's also about leadership—about taking people somewhere. As we look at these principles from 1 Thessalonians, I want you to be thinking about any potential areas of leadership you have right now. If you are a parent or a grandparent, you can be a shepherd leader. If you manage anyone in the workplace, you can be a shepherd leader.

Paul began this chapter with the opposite of shepherd leadership.

For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ² But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. ³ For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.

Deception

The first negative trait Paul listed was error and deception. But deception is never alone. Most people do not deceive for the sake of deception itself. Deception is not the end game. Deception is a means to an end. Don't believe me? Just think about why a five year old would lie to his mother? Five year olds lie so they stay out of trouble. It usually doesn't work because they tend to think that mom is not smart enough to figure out the crime, but they give it their best shot anyway. The reason a five year old would lie to his mother is the same reason people try to deceive you. They have a larger end goal in mind. The lying and deception is a means to a much greater end.

Power

In the case of leaders, the greater end is power and money—*so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.*⁵ *For we never came with words of flattery...* Flattery and pleasing men. This is a subtle kind of power or influence. A pastor who is seeking to please men will either change the truth of God's word or else subtly hold back on proclaiming some truths. If I intentionally skip over certain doctrines and passages, you may like me better. If I go out of my way not to offend you, you will tend to like me more. That's not true for everyone but it tends to work. You see it from Andy Stanley to Joel Osteen—and thousands of others like them.

Parents often make a similar mistake when their parenting goal is to make your children like you. No parent actually says this out loud, but their parenting style makes it clear that is what they are aiming at. If you let your children run all over you, you are misusing your power. You are people pleasing, even though your 'people' are little people who happen to live in your house.

On the other hand, power struggles go the opposite direction to control and abuse. About six months ago I discovered Diane Langberg. I don't know a ton about her other than that I love her tweets. She is usually dead on and deadly serious. She doesn't argue on Twitter as most people do, she just states penetrating truths. Like this one.

This is the inherent danger of church leadership. For the most part, the leaders control the narrative. By giving certain information or withholding other information, we control—or largely influence what you believe about our church.

For example, most of you know that we had a conflict with a former associate pastor. For the first week, the elders handled the details behind the scenes. We couldn't tell you that was happening until we sorted it out ourselves. But then we held a special congregational meeting to go over all of the facts. We laid out the issues and concerns step by step. We gave you the names and contact info for all of the people in the District who could verify these facts. As much as we possibly could, we wanted to be an open book while still protecting and caring for all parties. That congregational meeting was the single best congregational meeting I have ever attended in my life. It was hard. It was confusing. Many tears were shed but overall, it was healthy and good. I think the elders handled that well.



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Following

The purpose of churches or any Christian system is to feed and protect.

When leaders and systems use their power to feed themselves and protect the structure rather than those in their care, they are disobedient to God and the damage is great.

6:39 AM - 31 Dec 2018

About two years before that though, we messed up. We failed to follow the exact procedure for selecting elders. It was an innocent mistake and once we realized it, we told you what we missed, we apologized for the error and we set forth a plan to make sure it didn't happen again. So whether we handled things well or made mistakes, the goal was always transparency.

Elders, parents and everyone with any degree of authority must handle it with humility and care at all times—not pleasing men, but pleasing God.

Money

Money is another source of leadership corruption. Paul said that they did not serve “with a pretext for greed.” Paul always went out of his way not to be a financial burden on the churches he started. That's why he was a tentmaker. He had his own side business which paid the bills so that he could do ministry, even though he defended the right to receive a salary for gospel work.

We all know the temptation of money. Now we may not be in a position to get rich or you may not think that you are greedy but what is the opposite of greed? Generosity, right? So instead of asking ourselves if we are greedy, we should be evaluating the level of our generosity.

After Paul denied using his leadership for selfish gain, he began to list the positive traits of shepherd leadership they modeled before the church body.

⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸ So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

⁹ For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹ For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹² 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.

1. Gentle

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. That is such a tender way to talk about ministry, isn't it? It's not about the results, it's about how we care for one another. It's a wonderful picture but it isn't always easy to do.

After Christmas when Ryan and Monica were here, we took a stroll through the little shops in Viroqua. I discovered 5-6 shops I didn't even know existed. While we were in one of the shops, I grabbed Ryan's coat and reminded him of how I used to do that in Walmart. I would go up to him and grab the lapel of his winter coat and push him against a shelf. It was all slowly and gently and all in fun. He did remember me doing that a few times but then I told him something he did not remember. When he was about three or four, we were walking through Target in Madison, when we still lived in Prairie du Sac. Ryan wasn't listening to me and I was getting increasingly frustrated. Finally, I picked him up and put him on an empty shelf and gave him my best "If you don't listen to your dad, so help me..." speeches. I wasn't yelling but I was out of control. Putting him on the shelf was my semi-restrained way of really blowing a gasket. I immediately regretted doing that and still feel a little guilty to this day.

It wasn't long after that that I attended a conference in the Twin Cities. Guess what the speaker was talking about? Gentleness. That one was just for me. It was actually a prophecy conference where they were trying to teach you to prophesy over one another. I attended because I was still trying to figure out my views on prophecy. After the message there was an altar call. I went to the front just bawling over my lack of gentleness. The Holy Spirit was majorly convicting me and I literally stood up there and wept. But the strange thing was that this woman kept trying to prophesy over me. She would say, "I think the Lord wants you to..." and I would say no, I'm up here because I am repenting of my lack of gentleness in my parenting. Then she tried to prophesy something over me again and completely missed the mark. She just wasn't listening to me. So the really strange thing was that she was attempting to prophesy in the Spirit but all the while she was missing what the Holy Spirit was actually doing right then. Sadly, the conference was mostly bad teaching but despite all of that, the Lord used that mess to get my attention. It was like he took hold of my collar—but gently, like a loving father and said, "This has to stop. This does not come from me." My anger did not miraculously disappear after that, but it was a definite turning point in my life and in my parenting.

2. Relational

So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

This is just a beautiful section of Scripture. Paul was like a mother to them, like a father to them and was affectionately desirous of them. This reminds us again that all spiritual growth takes place in the context of relationships. We need others to come alongside of us and treat us this way. We need to be in healthy relationships, which there is no such thing as a lone ranger Christian. There's an old, tired cliché—"Going to a church doesn't make you a Christian any more than being in a garage makes you a car." I get the big idea of that sentiment, but some who say this think that they can grow spiritually on their own. I've said it before. If you were alone on a desert island with just you, the Bible and the Holy Spirit, could you grow in your faith? Absolutely. But that is not God's plan for us. His plan is that we would be in relationships with other believers—to live, learn and grow together. This is assumed throughout the New Testament.

Now I am painfully aware that many have left the local church because they have been so badly hurt by the church. I truly ache for these people. I have heard endless stories of spiritual abuse within churches, which is usually centered on the leaders in the church. Which is why we are so committed to this church being a safe place. Going back to the congregational meeting I mentioned before. I know of several people who did not attend that meeting because they assumed it was going to be ugly and probably result in yet another church split. It could have happened and it has happened a dozen times in our small town. But God spared us and I think his mercy was extended to us, at least in part, because we work hard at transparency in leadership as I already mentioned as well as developing healthy relationships in the body. But it all starts with leadership. If the leaders are not healthy that will inevitably trickle down into the pews. The same is true in your parenting. Much of your parenting is only as healthy as your marriage. Marriage is the leadership crucible for your parenting and one cannot be strong without the other.

3. Genuine

¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers.

I'd like to throw out another quote from Diane Langberg here. In the past two years I have been reading a lot about healthy leadership as well as abusive leadership in the church and in Christian organizations. Karen thinks that I read too much of the negative examples and not enough positive ones. That could be true at times but I think we need to look at how things go wrong so we can learn from those as well. And far too often I have seen what Diane Langberg is pointing out.



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Following

The position of spiritual authority lends credence to the words spoken as being accurately representative of God. We think position implies a certain character when in fact position may be used to hide character.

5:00 AM - 3 Jan 2019

Having a leadership position is sort of like possessing leadership skills. Of course we want competent leaders. The last thing we want is leaders mismanaging finances, ministries, programs, etc. That would be a disaster. But leadership position is like a leadership gift in the

sense that neither is inherently based on character. Just because someone gets up and delivers a sermon doesn't mean he is qualified to do so; that he is a person of character; that he is caring for his sheep like a mother and father do for their children. In fact, if a controversy ever does arise, a one of the first things that a leader with poor character is hide behind their leadership position. Character always trumps giftedness. The more important the position, the more skill and gifting is required. If I am having heart surgery, I don't want a med school dropout cutting me open, right? The same can be true in ministry. We should never devalue competency and giftedness but neither should we ever elevate it over character.

4. Bold

² But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹² 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.

Paul was bold enough to proclaim the gospel to this town filled with pagans. Proclaiming the truth—especially in the face of suffering and persecution—requires tremendous boldness. Paul also had the boldness to confront sin and exhort fellow believers when necessary.

Rich Maurer
January 6, 2019

¹ <https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/173946-carey-nieuwhof-church-needs-more-spiritual-entrepreneurs-not-shepherds.html/4>