

Becoming Shepherds in Sheep's Clothing

Introduction

Good morning! The past year and a half without a pastor has been quite a ride. I don't know about you, but I think that choosing the next pastor was an awesome responsibility. A lot of work for the committee. Anxious and expectant waiting for us in the congregation. Who was the PNC going to pick? One of the advantages of working in an office with a member of the PNC is that we occasionally found stray resumes that were deleted on Nickel's hard drive. There are some amazing tools out there. And then we would occasionally find some crumbled in the wastebasket. Last spring I just happened to find this application in her wastebasket. [take out a pasted together very crumpled sheet of paper]

Dear Covenant Presbyterian Church Pastor Nominating Committee.

Let me introduce myself. I am a 34 year old pastor who has been preaching for over 29 years. My sermons are always 20 minutes long during which time I provide clear, meaningful and thought provoking messages. I am fluent in Hebrew and New Testament Greek.

I have a burning desire to work with the youth, and spend all my free time with senior citizens and visiting those who are shut-ins. In my last church I was able to stay focused on the needs of the church while maintaining an outward focus on the community. I wear bi-focals in order to keep both in focus.

I have a great sense of humor but maintain the gravity and dignity of the office. I worked my way through college and seminary as a stand-up comedian and worked days in a funeral parlor.

My main motivational gift is visionary leadership along with skills for maintaining existing structures for years – long after every one else has abandoned them.

My wife is a gifted woman who is a stay-at-home mom who works nights outside the home as a lawyer ministering to the homeless by providing free legal protection. She is gifted at children's ministry and has been the head of both the Children's Ministry and Women's Ministry for the last 17 years. The weekly bible study she holds in her home for young mothers now reaches over 950 women each week. She is also a gifted musician who plays the pipe organ and electric guitar. She's hoping that you'll invite her to serve in these roles at your church.

I hope you'll carefully consider my application.

When I asked Nickel why they didn't pick this guy, she said that he dropped out of the ministry from burn out.

We all have ideas of the ideal pastor and then God brings us a real person.

A pastor not only faces unrealistic expectations but difficult challenges. This morning I would like to talk about how we the congregation are called to care for and honor and respect the pastor in our midst. As we embark on a new marriage between pastor and congregation, Consider this sermon – pre-marriage counseling.

Over the past several months I have asked pastors to consider what they would want their congregations to know about treating a pastor. Graciously and anonymously they have contributed to this sermon. Listen to their hearts and allow the Holy Spirit to influence your hearts concerning this important step in the life of The Barn.

If you are a guest here from another congregation – just checking us out – you can apply all of these principles to your relationship with your pastors. If you're here as a guest and don't have a pastor or local church – I would encourage you to sit back and observe how the body of Christ is suppose to work. For all of us, some of these principles are applicable to relationships to those who are over you – like bosses and teachers.

What insight does God's word have on this subject? Lets hear the word of God together.

¹² Now also we beseech you, brethren, get to know those who labor among you [recognize them for what they are, acknowledge and appreciate and respect them all]--your leaders who are over you in the Lord and those who warn and kindly reprove and exhort you. ¹³ And hold them in very high and most affectionate esteem in [intelligent and sympathetic] appreciation of their work.

I Thessalonians 5:12-13 (Amplified)

[Prayer]

The Unique Call of the Pastor

Did you notice the verbs used in our passage this morning: to get to know, recognize, acknowledge, appreciate, respect and hold them in very high and most affectionate esteem. In a way, our scripture is calling us, as sheep in our pastor's flock, to have a shepherd's heart towards our shepherd – to be shepherds in sheep's clothing. Why is this so important? Why does Paul and the Holy Spirit consider this sooo important?

We all know the basic roles of the senior pastor to feed the sheep, to teach and preach and to lead the church. But did you know that pastor is also called to a prophetic role. Listen to the heart of one of my pastor friends:

“Many people want a pastor to efficiently manage systems, services, and programs that nicely package and dispense God in easy doses, and comfortably facilitate nominal Christianity.

Real Christianity isn't quite so tame and the prophetic voice isn't usually very calming. Sometimes that "narrow road" involves asking questions and facing realities that people might prefer to sweep under the church rug. All that to say, perhaps people should be prepared to accept that a true pastor isn't really fulfilling his calling unless some people in the church are uncomfortable, offended, and accusing him of being a heretic (which is likely if you take too many of Jesus' teachings seriously).”

To be the one who is called to prophetically speak God's word into a congregation and a community presents a challenge unlike any other job. Sean is not called just to lead us – but he is called to speak the truth to us in areas that we are probably deaf. And to do that requires the kind of support that Paul talks about in our text this morning.

Changes in the Role of Pastor

Loss of Respect

Another important thing to note is that the respect for Pastoral calling has changed over the years. Years ago, the pastor was **the** most respected occupation. Today Pharmacists hold that place of respect and pastors are around tenth. According to George Gallup

"Currently, a slim majority of the public rates the honesty and ethical standards of the clergy as 'very high' or 'high,' but one person in three considers them only average, and one in ten thinks they are 'low' or 'very low.'"

This raises the bar for the congregation. In the past, the pastor's position was naturally a place of honor. Today, when Sean stands on the soccer fields or in the grocery store and people find out that he is a pastor – most will not hold his position in respect.

Without the respect from the community it is incumbent upon us to heed Paul's call to acknowledge and appreciate and respect Sean

Different Challenges

Another change is that problems that pastors face today have changed drastically – even in the last 30 years. My wife Barbara was the church secretary for our church in the 1970's. I would like to read some of the messages Barbara left for our pastor at that time and compare them to some that Sharon is actually going to send to Sean. Technology is amazing isn't it? We can recover deleted files from our hard drivers and intercept messages before they have been sent.

70's John,
Joe and Margaret want to set up an appointment for pre-marriage counseling
07' Sean,
Chad and Megan were wondering if you could meet at their apartment tonight for pre-marriage counseling.

70's John,
The State Department of Child and Family Services called and want to talk about placing a child with a family in our congregation.
'07 Sean,
The State Department of Child and Family Services called and want to audit our procedures about how we train our Sunday School teachers and nursery care givers to ensure the safety of the children of this state.

70's John,
Frank wants you to know that the sink in the men's room is clogged.
07' Sean,
George wants you to know that the hard disk on your computer has crashed and this week's sermon is gone

And if we think that the demands on Sean are greater than ever, just think what it will be like in 30-40 years – at the end of Sean's times of ministry. I would not be surprised if he'll be facing bio-ethical issues brought to his office that would shock us if we heard them today.

Paul calls us to intelligent and sympathetic appreciation of our Pastors for their work.

The Toll on Pastors

These changes have taken their toll on our pastors . According to one study of pastors by Focus on the Family:

50 percent feel they are unable to meet the demands of the job.

90 percent feel they were inadequately trained to cope with the demands of ministry.

33 percent have seriously considered leaving the pastorate.

The Focus on the Family survey found this about the home lives of pastors:

80 percent believe that pastoral ministry affected their families negatively.

33 percent said that ministry is an outright hazard to family life.

94 percent feel pressure to have an ideal family.

And its no wonder that Paul calls us to “hold them in very high and affectionate esteem.”

Heavy Expectations

In this month’s church newsletter I wrote about how we need to lay down our expectations for Sean. Last week I sent an email to about 75 of you and asked what your expectations are for Sean. These are the actual words that you wrote:

Preaching

- I expect Sean to help us understand Scripture in a new and challenging way.
- I desire Sean to focus on content more than technique...on Christlike personal relationships more than the latest popular church growth plan
- I expect Sean to make our Christian beliefs relevant to the lives we live in the world each day.
- I am expecting Sean to provide meaningful Sunday messages. The explanation should be clear, meaningful, and thought provoking. Each Sunday should be a "wake up" call and really excite us to read the bible more.

Leadership / Vision

- I expect Sean, as our new Senior Pastor, to unite the congregation under a shared vision for expanding God's Kingdom in Simsbury and the Farmington Valley.
- To be able to articulate and clearly cast a compelling vision for our church;
- To clearly see God's vision; to passionately articulate and model that vision so others catch it; to fight for it when necessary!!
- To determine what God is doing at the Barn and in our larger community, and then formulate a clear strategy to lead our leaders to accomplish God's purposes in our community.
- I expect Sean to pray, listen, learn and lead as he discerns God's call for him as pastor of this church. And I hope and believe he will take plenty of time for the praying, listening (to God and to the body)
- To carry a mantle of anointed leadership, listening for God's voice for guidance, and bringing God's love to our community in a way that builds His kingdom and does His will.
- To lead the church in a new direction
- To grow the church
- To learn about our group history, personalities, and ministries
- To help us identify and deal with our differences and divisions
- To take our multifaceted programs and multitalented leadership and focus and simplify direction
- To make it a priority to reach out to and encourage more of our community to discover the Barn
- To inspire us to follow his leadership

- To foster creative inspiration

Whoa – anybody here want to take on this job?

And then these two were added – hopefully with tongue in check

- I expect Sean to fix all problems we had before he came
- To make the changes I want but not the ones I don't want

Worship

- I expect Sean to help to reconcile longstanding differences of opinion between members or groups of members in the church
- To direct content of worship services
- To take charge of the worship services.

Administration / Staff

- I expect Sean to build a team of the right staff and/or leaders –
- To improve our organizational structure.
- To be a visible presence at church activities.
- To bring a more stable environment to the church.
- To be in the office at the church often
- To make difficult personnel decisions or changes when necessary

Pastoral Care

- I expect Sean to provide some pastoral care and challenge small groups and others to carry the pastoral care load as well.
- To set up and utilize a pastoral care team but when at all possible, to personally make contact with those people with serious illness or near death circumstances or extreme personal crisis's.

Character / Personal Growth

- I expect Sean to be an example of a godly man. - to watch his life and his doctrine closely.
- To model appropriate care for his family -and challenge others to do the same - by setting godly boundaries in work related areas.

Are any of these bad? Not really. But some of them carry with them subtle hooks. “Each Sunday.” “Clear strategy” “Plenty of time.” “Visible presence at church activities” Is that all church activities – or just the activities that I am involved in? Will he hit the mark every Sunday with his sermons? Will the strategy be clear to you. Will the changes he make improve the organizational structure in your opinion? Who defines “when at all possible?” Will the amount of time that he spends praying meet your definition or his of “plenty.”

How Can We Care for Sean?

With the unique call on Sean, with the decreasing respect in the community for authority and pastoral authority in particular, and with our high and lofty expectations, what is God's heart? How can we care for Sean?

Dealing with Our Expectations

Let's start with our expectations.

In our text Paul encourages us to “get to know” Sean. What needs to happen over the next several months and years is that we the congregation need to lay down our expectations – as good as they are - to get to know Sean's expectations and then work with him – and clearly

agree on shared expectations. Nothing will sabotage a good relationship quicker than unfulfilled expectations. They are poison to any relationship. We have to deal with them right up front. And the solution that Paul gives us is that we are to know Sean. And that includes answering the question: "What are his expectations?"

Consider him worthy of Double Honor

I want you to look with me at another Scripture

¹⁷The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." ¹⁹Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.

I Timothy 5:17-20 (NASB)

Paul's statement to Timothy is unusual. What is going on here with the connection between "double honor" and "paying wages"? The Greek word used here literally means "the value or money paid." It's where we get the word "honorarium." Paul is telling Timothy how things should be conducted in the churches. And paying your Pastor a fair wage is important. Believe it or not, some people think that a pastor should be kept in poverty because it will make him more spiritual and thus a better pastor.

We had a youth pastor one time who had inherited a car from his parents and so for a time had three cars. A good Christian member of our church called him to tell him that it did not look right for a pastor to have three cars!

Part of paying an adequate wage includes allowing Sean to have many planned times apart. The church can become stifling. Make sure that Sean has time to get apart - to get alone with God – regularly and for various durations.

Close the Loop with Sean

Another thing that Paul tells us in his letter to Timothy is not to entertain an accusation against one of the leaders without 2 or 3 witnesses. Another way to say that – is to say. Close the loop with Sean if you have something against him – either something he has said or something that he has done.

It's easy to say something from the pulpit and have it be misunderstood. Go to him directly.

Just a couple of weeks ago I was teaching Sunday School with the 4's and 5's. We were studying Gideon. You remember the story where Gideon had 3000 men for battle and God told him that he had too many men. God directed Gideon to place these 3000 men before a stream and ask them to drink. Those that brought that water up to their mouth cupped in their hands would be chosen. Those that sucked the water out directly would be sent home. I thought it would be helpful for the kids to remember the story by having them try this. And so I brought a big pan of water and we had the kids do this.

Well about a week later one of the mothers told me how well this worked with her daughter. It happened that one morning her daughter had her cereal spilled all over the table. The mother told the daughter that she knew better and that she would have to go into time out. Quick as a whip – well equipped from her Sunday School teacher, the daughter said:

I was just doing what Mister Bob taught us in Sunday School.

So the moral of the story – is that biblical teaching can be misunderstood. Close the loop with Sean if you have anything against him.

Pray for Him

What is another way for us to shepherd our shepherd. We are told by Paul in I Timothy 2:1-2ⁱ that we are to pray for all who are in authority. Sean is one in authority. A major way that we can care for Sean is to remember him in prayer - daily. Remember Jill in prayer – daily. Make it a habit. Build it into one of your family times of grace. It is a way to honor him. It is a way to appreciate him. The demands on Sean are unique. He, in ways that you and I will never know, is on the front lines of ministry. Very few other positions have such a high burn out rate. Did you know that very few people who start in the pastoral ministry – retire from the pastoral ministry? We don't want to make Sean a statistic and one way to do that is to pray for him regularly.

Everyday People

Listen to the heart of three of my pastor friends:

One thing I would add is...for people in the congregation to take the initiative to invite that pastor and his family over for dinner and fun. It can be straining to take the initiative as a pastor to get to know everyone. Show me love as a brother in Christ. Pastors tend to be givers, give them opportunities to be receivers of your compassion, generosity and friendship

Do some things with the pastor and his family that everyone does, that his family really likes but may not be able to afford unless you pay at least some of the cost.

I have been deeply blessed by those in our body who have learned to be my friend, and treated me as regular person.

Sean wants you to treat him as a real person with real needs and real weaknesses – yes we don't know them yet – but we'll find them out.

Appreciate Him

Twice in our Scripture this morning Paul uses the word appreciate. One of my pastor friends gave us one simple way to appreciate Sean and that was through remembering anniversaries and special milestones in Sean's life. What would it be like here at the Barn if we did that for Sean? Let's learn how to cultivate a spirit of celebration and appreciation of our leader. Sean wants us to learn how to intelligently and sympathetically appreciate his work.

Family Time

Finally, there is a very interesting note that Paul makes at the end of I Corinthians.ⁱⁱ He tells the Corinthian church to shepherd one of their leaders by taking special care for his family. To honor and respect and care for Sean means that we will honor his family time and his privacy. The demands of ministry can consume him 24/7. We need to be very careful that we allow him to guard that time carefully.

Commitments – worship team can come up

I want us to close with a time of confession and reflection. I have asked a number of you to offer up prayers during this time. There is a microphone down front for them to come forward and offer these prayers. After each one is prayed, I want all of us who can honestly agree with this prayer to issue a hearty amen. But lets just say the amen if we really believe it. Let's pray:

Father you have called us to lay down our expectations that we have and to get to know Sean's expectations:

1. Lord I lay down my expectations for Sean and commit to work with him to develop a set of shared realistic expectations for advancing the kingdom here at The Barn

And all the people said "Amen"

Father you have said in your word that we are to consider our pastors as worthy of "Double Honor"

2. Father, I commit to do my part in seeing that Sean is adequately compensated for the work that he does here

And all the people said "Amen"

Father, we are told in your word to close the loop with each other is we have anything against them.

3. Father I commit to go to Sean first with any problems I have with him – with things he has said or done.

And all the people said "Amen"

Father, your word tells us to regularly pray for those in authority

4. Father I commit to pray for Sean and his family on a regular basis

And all the people said "Amen"

Father, your word tells us that we are to get to know those who labor among us

5. Lord, I commit to seeing Sean as a real person with real needs and real feelings

And all the people said "Amen"

Father – it says in your word that a leader in your church must manage their family well.

6. Holy Spirit, I commit to respecting Sean's family boundaries and support him as he leads his family as well as the church

And all the people said "Amen"

Let's Pray.

ⁱ I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings **and all those in authority**, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. **I Timothy 2:1-2**

ⁱⁱ ¹⁵ Would you do me a favor, friends, and give special recognition to the family of Stephanas? You know, they were among the first converts in Greece, and they've put themselves out, serving Christians ever since then. ¹⁶ I want you to honor and look up to people like that: companions and workers who show us how to do it, giving us something to aspire to. **I Corinthians 16:15-16 (The Message)**