

**First Things First:
Being a Pastor in the Home**

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First Things First: Being a Pastor in the Home

We believe that a pastor in the church must first be a pastor in the home. This requires more than a subjective sense of “calling.” A pastor is not perfect, but the one who aspires to be a pastor must consistently demonstrate a general godliness in the home in addition to other areas of his life. This qualification is not trivial and should never be overlooked. Therefore, every local church must observe a pattern of conformity to biblical qualifications before it confirms a man for ministry. Among the qualifications, a man must spiritually manage his wife and children. We hope this essay serves to encourage the aspiring pastor to be a good father in the home.

Grounded in the Love of God the Father

The pastoral criteria in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1—that a pastor first must demonstrate leadership in the home—is grounded in the love of God the Father.¹ God the Father, the first person of the Holy Trinity, is the supreme model of fatherly care. An earthly father is always stumbling after the glorious example of his heavenly Father.

Earthly fathers must look to God the Father if they are to manage their household. God cares for his children. He listens to their prayers. He protects them and cares for them. When Jesus wishes to illustrate the goodness of God the Father, he compares Him to an earthly father: If an earthly father cares for his children, how much more the Heavenly Father?²

God the Father brings about the unity of His children.³ In so doing, He gives them instruction. If a pastor is to manage his household, he must not merely insist on rules for the sake of rules. God is sovereign, but He is not arbitrary. The good is grounded in God’s holiness, and so He usually explains His laws such that we are drawn to the deeper issues of the heart.⁴

God is accessible to His children. Of course, his omnipresence ensures a level of accessibility that we are unable to achieve. Even so, we can learn greatly from our Heavenly Father’s desire to commune with His children. A dad cannot reflect the Father when he is too busy watching television, checking email, taking calls, or being otherwise habitually inaccessible. We must reject the world’s image of a successful man as always working. If we are to be godly fathers that manage our homes well, then we must learn to turn off the cell phone and laptop and be home mentally when we are home physically. As the saying goes, “Wherever you are, be all there.”

¹This analogy is biblical, although—as with all analogies—God is not like human fathers in *all* respects. The above comparison is a fit analogy.

²Matthew 7:9.

³By this we mean a biblical unity as seen in the so-called High Priestly Prayer in John 17.

⁴Scripture bears this out repeatedly. God explains his prohibition against eating from the tree by saying, “On the day you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Five Suggestions for Fathers

So far, so good; but the problem is often in the implementation. Well-intentioned men have fallen short of shepherding their families for lack of specific direction. What follows is hardly exhaustive, but will serve as a good starting point for meditation as well as further conversation and study. The following five suggestions outline a biblical picture of shepherding the family in a way that is fitting for all Christian men, but especially for a man who aspires to the office of pastor.

1. Worship Regularly as a Family

Many others have done a good job emphasizing the importance of family worship.⁵ Start by choosing a time that works for your family and stick with it. Inconsistency is an enemy of family worship. Family worship is a time of praying as a family, reading Scripture, singing to the Lord, and a teaching time that the father should lead. With smaller children, keep it short (15–20 minutes). In our own various practices of family worship, we sing a mixture of adult hymns and children’s songs. The goal is to be structured without being overly formal.

Family worship will train your children to sit through a worship service and allow them to practice between Sundays. In family worship the father is established as the primary leader and teacher of God’s Word in the family. It is imperative that the father be a man of holiness and integrity or else family worship may be a time of gross hypocrisy and sow seeds of unbelief.

Scripture memorization is another important aspect of family worship. Little children can learn Scripture through songs and other creative memorization techniques. Anything you can do to help them hide God’s Word in their heart will not be wasted.

2. Catechize Your Children

A catechism provides an elementary summary of essential Christian doctrine.⁶ The question and answer format naturally challenges children to memorize biblical truth that will instill a theological framework for years to come. These truths can be referenced in other times of teaching and in issues of discipline throughout the day. A child who knows the essentials of the Christian faith will not easily fall prey to false teaching and will remember the gospel, even in times of waywardness.

Many Baptist catechisms are available, including the Charleston Association’s catechism (1813), Spurgeon’s catechism (1855), and James Boyce’s catechism, often freely accessible online. Regarding the historic use of catechisms among Southern Baptists, Timothy George writes:

⁵For examples, see Voddie Baucham, *Family Driven Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007); Terry L. Johnson, *The Family Worship Book* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2007); Malcolm B. Yarnell III, “My Son, Be Strong in the Grace that Is in Jesus Christ: The Baptist Family at Worship,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 49 (2006): 49–64.

⁶In addition to teaching children a biblical and Baptist catechism it is also helpful to teach them the Lord’s Prayer. In it, children learn a pattern of prayer that will serve them well. We are thankful for Ken Hemphill for reminding Baptists of the eternal value of our Lord’s Prayer. When Jesus’ disciples asked their Master, “Teach us to pray,” He did not respond with a lesson but with a prayer. Arming a child with Jesus’ prayer is a tender reliance on the Master and an act of humility as a parent. No one can teach a child to pray better than Christ, who forever lives to make intercession for his church. Ken Hemphill, *The Prayer of Jesus: The Promise and Power of Living in the Lord’s Prayer* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001).

Through the early twentieth century, Southern Baptists followed Spurgeon's wise counsel and regularly used catechisms in the religious education of their children. In fact, when the Baptist Sunday School Board was organized in 1891, the very first publication was *A Catechism of Bible Teaching* by John A. Broadus.⁷

The use of catechism is rare in most Baptist churches and Christian homes today, and we would do well to recover their use in both the church and the home.

3. Teach Your Children about Christian Heroes

Young children need heroes. The author of Hebrews walks his reader down the so-called faith hall of fame.⁸ Each portrait reveals a saint who "gained approval . . . through faith."⁹ These men and women exemplify both fear of God and boldness toward man, and thus serve as timeless examples. A man who leads his family to know and appreciate the heritage of faith and exemplifies that faith will, in the process, become a hero to his own children.

We should teach our children about such servants as William Tyndale, Menno Simmons, Charles Wesley, William Carey, George Muller, Lottie Moon, and Jim Elliott. We should tell them stories of brave men and women who gave their lives for Christ and of persecuted Christians today who continue to die for the Master. Doing these things will help to spark your child's imagination to dream and do great things for Christ. Teach them through the stories of these and other saints about the importance of fearing God and living fearlessly for God.¹⁰ The world is more than happy to supply "heroes" if you do not.

4. Show Your Children a Passion for Missions and Evangelism

There is no substitute for taking your children witnessing or on a mission trip. Even young children can learn to pray for a people group or missionary. As part of your family time of worship, pray for missionaries and unreached people groups. These experiences will stick with your children and teach them to think globally.

Much is rightly made of the Great Commission in our churches and seminaries. However, if our denomination is truly to be a Great Commission people, we must have Great Commission fathers. Christ only commissioned his disciples after he had given them on-the-job training. A biblical manager leads by example, and this means that the home must be a place of gospel fervency.

L.R. Scarborough wrote that parents should pray that God would call their children into full-time ministry and make the home an atmosphere "favorable for doing God's will."¹¹ A father who manages the home well guards not only his own spiritual purity but also the spiritual purity of the home. By nurturing a spiritual environment, a godly father shows his children the sweetness of Christ, and they will in turn want others to taste and see His goodness.

⁷*Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms: John A. Broadus*, ed. Timothy George and Denise George (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 17–18.

⁸Hebrews 11.

⁹Hebrews 11:39.

¹⁰E.g. Richard M. Hannula, *Trial and Triumph: Stories from Church History* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999).

¹¹L.R. Scarborough, *Recruits for World Conquests* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1914), 26.

5. Disciple Your Family

Paul says that husbands are to cleanse their wives by the washing of water with the Word.¹² Men must teach Scripture and promote a spiritual environment, being vigilant over what the family watches on television, the relationships among family members, influences of friends and family, and the heart-attitudes of his home flock.

As a pastor of the home, a father cultivates spiritual growth in his wife and children, praising sanctification and lovingly admonishing sin. This requires the constant application of Scripture to everyday life. Deuteronomy 6:7 says, “You shall teach [the law] diligently to your sons.” It goes on to say the business of shepherding one’s family in the Word is not merely about a time of family worship but extends to all aspects of life: “And you shall talk of [the law] when you sit in your house and when you walk . . . and when you lie down and when you rise up.” The father is a full-time pastor in the home, directing even the topics of conversation!

No doubt a godly wife is an invaluable help and takes the lead in teaching children during the day when the father is at work, but the husband must resist the temptation to abdicate his pastoral responsibilities. He is the spiritual leader of the home.¹³ Many families pray, read Scripture, have devotions, and go to church only when prompted or insisted upon by the wife. A pastor in the home is a leader in the home, taking God’s Word and applying it with theological precision, wisdom, personal insight, gentleness, servant leadership, and patience. Only then is he qualified for any level of pastoral leadership in the local church.

Implications for the Local Church

What qualifies a man to be a pastor in the local church? Some will immediately think of degrees, ordination, or experience. Yet in the Apostle Paul’s list of pastoral qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, he speaks not of educational caliber or denominational connections but of godly character. While degrees, ordination, and experience are worthy achievements, godly character is essential for the pastor: Without it he is unqualified for pastoral ministry. If a man fails to embody consistently the godly characteristics contained in the Pastoral Epistles, then he is unqualified for pastoral ministry.

Godly character is especially tested in the home because the true colors of a man’s inner character come out most vividly in the home. This is one reason why a pastor must be hospitable.¹⁴ Hospitality not only demonstrates the kindness and gracious welcoming of God but it also allows others to see the pastor (and his family) in his natural environment. Any man can put on a righteous act when in public; even the Pharisees did that. But a godly man who seeks to be a pastor must demonstrate noble character in all areas of his life and this includes shepherding his wife and children in the home.

First Timothy 3:1–7 addresses those who aspire to be pastors¹⁵ in the terms of character and reputation. Anyone serving in the role of the pastor must therefore exhibit godly character. Godly character does not mean that someone is perfect, lest the office be vacant on Earth until

¹²Ephesians 5:26.

¹³*Baptist Faith and Message* (2000), art. xviii.

¹⁴1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8 mention hospitality as a necessary attribute of one aspiring to be a pastor.

¹⁵Pastor, overseer, and bishop are synonymous in the New Testament. In 1 Peter 5:2 and Acts 20:28 elders are tasked with shepherding (Gk. *poimnion*) the saints. Cf. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 912.

the coming of Christ. It is, however, a pattern of conformity to the righteousness of Christ such that a pastor can say to his people, “Follow me as I follow Christ.”¹⁶

Feeling called to ministry is not a sufficient qualification for ministry. The local church must observe and confirm that a man who *feels* called to pastoral ministry *demonstrates* in his life, and specifically in his home life, the qualifications of a pastor. So the man who wishes to honor God as he seeks the office of pastor will have thought long and hard concerning his own readiness for ministry. He will have requested pastoral counsel concerning his qualification for ministry. He will have spent hours in prayer and perhaps days of fasting over areas where his life is not yet conformed to the Pauline qualifications. A wise man will not seek to shepherd a local church if he is unable to shepherd his family.

The instruction of the Apostle Paul is clear: A pastor must be one who “manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity—but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?”¹⁷ The argument here is from one divine institution to another. If a man cannot manage his own wife and children, he and the local church have no reason to think that he will be able to shepherd a local congregation of men, women, and children!

Elsewhere, Paul writes, “An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.”¹⁸ A pastor must be faithful to his wife and lead his children: If his children are habitually unruly, then he is unqualified to be a pastor. At the very least, it reflects poorly on his ability to lead and to be a model for Christians and those outside the church. Moreover, a man whose time is spent looking after unruly children has little time to tend to his “spiritual children.”

A man who does not properly lead his own family will find it hard to have a good reputation with those outside the church.¹⁹ It would be ineffective and hypocritical to preach against gossip if one’s own wife runs the gossip mill. Likewise, a pastor who attempts to lead his church in obedience to Christ but whose own children are wayward is unqualified.

A pastor must manage his household. “Manage” (Gk. *proistemi*) has the primary meaning of “going before . . . to protect, care.”²⁰ The idea of household management “provides a commentary on the nature of a Christian father’s role within his family; his leadership should be . . . caring and protecting.”²¹ A pastor is to do these things diligently.²² His spiritual oversight in the home is not to be accidental but intentional. He is to be zealous in his leadership in the home, as with all good works.²³

Conclusion

This spiritual oversight in the home, including the physical and spiritual care and protection of one’s wife and children, is what we call shepherding in the home. Just as Jesus Christ, the

¹⁶1 Corinthians 11:1.

¹⁷1 Timothy 3:4–5.

¹⁸Titus 1:6.

¹⁹1 Timothy 3:7.

²⁰William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 178.

²¹Ibid.

²²Romans 12:8.

²³Titus 2:14.

Shepherd, feeds us by His Word and leads us by His Spirit, so the aspiring pastor, as under-shepherd, must feed his wife and children by the Word and lead them sacrificially in worship and discipleship. Before he is pastor of a church he must be pastor of the home. If he is not a pastor in the home, he is not fit to be a pastor in the church.²⁴

²⁴This does not mean a pastor must be married with children. It does mean, however, that if he is married with children, he must exemplify spiritual oversight in the home as evidence of his calling to ministry.



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