First Year Priorities in Pastoral Ministry and Spirituality

This theological compendium provides an overview of establishing health pastoral disciplines and practices along with self-awareness in the first year of leadership ministry.[1]

Serving the Lord as ministry leader is a unique and spiritually intense endeavor. The sheer mechanics of ministry such as preaching, visitation, etc. are not difficult in and of themselves. As one older pastor exclaimed, "we preach, pray, and plug away!" However, conceptually the pastor is tasked with keeping the church in harmony with its biblical identity and purposes. This task often brings many new challenges and accompanying emotions that new ministry leaders are not fully prepared to engage. I have found the following tips to be helpful.

I. Establish present, personal patterns of *intentional growth* and d*emonstration of the Spirit* (filling of Sprit, Fruit/virtues of Spirit and avoid quenching/ grieving the Spirit).

In 1592, Perkins wrote, "If ministers are to see any fruit from their ministry, they must first sanctify themselves and cleanse their hearts by repentance before they presume to stand up to rebuke sin in others. Let them not think that their golden words will do as much good as their dead lives will do harm." William Perkins (1592), *The Art of Prophesying,* 151).

A. Establish Bible reading/ study/ devotional plans

B. Institute prayer plans

C. Create family ministry plans

D. Schedule marriage enrichment plans

E. Create ongoing professional ministry development plans

F. Identify church-outreach plans

II. Continually review the NT teaching on the minister, the nature of ministry (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 1-3; 2 Cor 1-5; 1 Timothy), the nature of church (Mat 16:13-20; Rev 1-3) and the nature of true spirituality (Eph 5; Gal 5; Rom 6).

All too often, ministry is viewed only as a human endeavor. In 1656, Richard Baxter wrote, "Self-interest is a bad trade to choose . . . Hard studies, much knowledge, and excellent preaching are more glorious but still hypocritical sins when they are done for our glory Richard Baxter (1656), *The Reformed Pastor: A Pattern for Personal Growth and Ministry*, 13-14).

A. Consciously *defer praise* from others. Thank parishioners for kind words though always redirect praise to the Lord.

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B. Consciously *depersonalize criticism*

View/ use criticism as an opportunity to encourage growth in others and/or your own growth. Many believers cannot accurately self-diagnose why they are not joyfully or growing in Christ, so they point to externals like their pastor, their spouse, or their church. While Jesus is perfect, He was continually rejected and criticized so ministry leaders need to prayerfully depersonalize criticism though learn from criticism.

In the fourth century, John Chrysostom wrote, "The priest (pastor) should treat those whom he rules as a father treats very young children. We are not disturbed by children's insults or blows or tears; nor do we think much of their laughter and approval and so with these people, we should not be much elevated by their praise nor much dejected by their censure . . ." John Chrysostom (347-407). *On the Priesthood*, 129

C. *Frame ministry conflict* between two great doctrinal truths:

1. The substitutionary atonement (Lamb metaphor).

Jesus died for the sins of opponents and persecutors so the goal is never simply to win a dispute, which might possibly turn opponents away from Christ or somehow impede repentance of a believer (I refer to this as the *Lamb metaphor* since Jesus died for the sins opponents).

2. The return of Christ (Lion metaphor)

In the return of Christ, Jesus will publicly reveal concealed sin along with the hidden motivation and conduct of believers; He Himself will avenge and vindicate His children (I call this the *Lion metaphor* since Jesus will roar). Be prepared to remain content to wait until the Judgment Seat of Christ if necessary for the Lord Himself to redress issues and provide vindication though always work for true biblical reconciliation.

III. *Recognize possible emotions* that might accompany pastoral ministry during the first years. Become *self-aware* without being too self-critical. Think about how you respond to situations as described below. This will help you become more self-aware and guard against extremes. How do you respond to the following experiences:

A. Loneliness so you . . .

B. Apprehension about pastoring so you . . .

C. Frustration so you . . .

D. Personal inadequacy so you . . .

E. Sheer excitement so you . . .

F. Fear of failure so you . . .

G. Spiritual attacks so you . . .

H. Fear of rejection so you . . .

I. Disagreement so you …

IV. Work at being *pastoral to the entire congregation* and not just one ministry group. Be careful that the "squeaky wheel does not get all the attention." Be sure that you are getting good exposure and feedback from the entire congregation.

A. Engage others with balanced, pleasant initiative (e.g., smile or in some cases do not smile … remembering ministry is not about you, etc.).

B. Avoid a passive demeanor.

C. Look for ministry opportunities in non-structured environments.

D. Maximize personal contact in all structured environment ministry settings. Preplanning and not over-scheduling yourself on Sunday morning will help. View Sunday ministry as an opportunity to connect and chat with as many people as possible.

E. Learn the names and prayer needs of parishioners.

F. Attempt to visit and get to know every family.

G. Do not compare or criticize previous pastors and ministry leaders.

H. Publicly rejoice in the former pastor's ministry as much as possible.

I. Try to spend at least 30% of your ministry time doing what you love to do (study; teach; evangelize; etc.).

V. Prayerfully develop specific ministry plans for each ministry area in collaboration with all the church ministry leaders.

A. Develop a list of measurable broad/specific 1st year ministry goals for each area of responsibility as you collaborate with ministry workers and ministry leaders. Consider using various organizational tools. See the following.

Ministry Category of responsibility	**Specific measurable goals of preschool**
Sunday preschool ministries	Example: Review current curriculum and instruct in proper curriculum use. 1. Develop ideas for recruitment 2. Review or write child-protection policies 3. Develop enrichment ideas for preschool Sunday School leaders and teachers.

B. Develop, disciple and begin to rebuild ministry teams and leaders.

C. Develop, renovate, communicate and celebrate ministry philosophy and ministry plans, successes, concerns, and problems. Avoid just being an analyst.

D. Spend focused time with ministry group leaders (Sunday school leaders, Youth leaders, etc.).

E. Maintain a broad congregational presence.

F. Nurture and guard staff and church leader relationships. Work hard at demonstrating personal trustworthiness and maintain confidentiality unless information needs to be shared.

G. Establish relationships with area pastors and professionals (e.g., counselors, funeral directors, etc.).

H. Maintain spiritual disciplines while retooling and re-equipping yourself for ongoing ministry focus (e.g., counseling, business related issues, etc.).

I. Work at developing good ministry habits while forcing yourself to work outside your personal comfort levels and develop good professional work ethics.

J. Develop a yearly calendar teaching/ preaching plan with file system.

VI. Oversee Ministry Management

A. Promote a yearly ministry planning session

1. Leadership retreat/ session with identified measurable goals.

2. Develop church and departmental calendars. Plan and post most events one year in advance such as staff/coordinator meetings, training sessions, retreats, camps, VBS, youth events, etc. Maintain firmness and flexibility with calendar conflicts.

B. Overseeing Church secretary/ salaried assistants.

1. Thoroughly understand their role/ ministry priority.

2. Communicate tasks clearly and timely.

3. Meet and debrief weekly; keep them informed.

4. Consider advice though you make final decisions.

C. Church monies/ spending decisions

1. Do not operate outside budget parameters without written permission.

2. Ask questions to clarify your understanding about budget.

3. Keep accurate, updated records.

4. Understand the difference between cash-flow and budgeted funds.

5. Understand the difference between designated and general contributions.

6. Understand the financial culture of church and trends in giving.

7. Develop a yearly and longer-term budget proposal (with rational support) and a "wish list" if the church ever receives a large, unexpected donation.

D. Leadership/ departmental meetings

1. Preparation- prepare to maximize the time together; provide agenda in advance; have someone take notes or minutes; provide food, etc.

2. Build a ministry team of invested gifted ministry partners rather than just ministry administrators or people on a committee.

E. Record keeping

1. Use Day-Timer/ Franklin Covey calendar system, etc. or electronic device that allow easy phone log, calendar, etc. Be sure to archive the calendar for reference if needed.

2. Communicate major conflicts to superior with written summary.

3. Communicate calendar to secretary/ spouse, on a weekly basis (have one home-calendar for all family events and be sure to highlight events that you do not want to miss).

VII. Establish Boundaries:

A. Take your day-off and do not do minister on your day-off unless it is a true pastoral emergency (this means no emails, no calls, no texts, etc.). My wife and I had to leave our small town on my day-off to escape the pressure and temptation to reengage ….

B. Find a hobby or interest that you enjoy and try to do it a little each day-this helps to disengage from the intensity of ministry.

C. Eat and exercise properly – this helps to manage stress.

D. Learn your own boundaries. As an example, after 9:00 PM my wife and I do not discuss ministry issues… and if we do when I awake the next morning the issue is on my mind.

E. Become a student of sanctification and a student of the deceitfulness of sin noting only the Lord can change people. Do not allow ministry to be reduced to mere human analysis. Pray for the Lord's work in the lives of people.

F. Interact with other pastors over Heb 13:17. Study and read from pastors who have gone on before us - this is critical as only pastors understand the burden of ministry. I love reading biographies of pastors. I suggest the following books that I have read time and time again. Some the books are out of print though used copies are available and many can be located free on the internet.

Lessons in Leadership, ed., Randal Roberts

A Minister's Obstacle's by Ralph G Turnbul

Walking with the Giants by Wiersbe

"The Swans Are Not Silent" series by John Piper (free pdf files are generally available on his web page, https://www.desiringgod.org/ (search for this series on the web page)

The Reformed Pastor by Baxter

The Arts of Prophesying by William Perkins

Summary handout

A. 30% gift-ministry priority. Try to spend at least 30% or more of your time doing what you love to do. For me it was to study and write lesson outlines of my teaching ministry.

B. Be sure that you are getting good exposure and feedback from the entire congregation (the squeaky wheel can get too much attention).

C. Become self-aware though not too self-critical-this was hard for me. We can be too hard on ourselves; Read through the Corinthian epistles and see how people rejected Paul's ministry.

D. Take your day-off and do not do minister on your day-off unless it is a true pastoral emergency (this means no emails, calls, etc.). My wife and I actually had to leave our small town on my day-off to escape the pressure and temptation to reengage ….

E. Find a hobby or interest that you enjoy and try to do it a little each day-this helps us to disengage. Eat a balanced diet and get physical exercise.

F. Set boundaries.

G. Become a student of sanctification and of the deceitfulness of sin and do not allow ministry to be reduced to mere human analysis. Pray for life change.

H. Interact with other pastors over Heb 13:17 and read pastoral biographies. I suggest the following books that I have read time and time again. Some the books are out of print though you find used copies and sometimes find free PDF copies.

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