

Marks of Good and Faithful Ministry

by Bill Scheidler

People can have some very high expectations when it comes to the pastor of their church. They expect the pastor to be there for them at all times. They expect their pastor to have a ready answer for all of their difficulties. They expect their pastor to have a deep and inspiring message every time he gets behind the pulpit. They expect the pastor to be a “man for all seasons.”

The real issue, however, is not what the people’s expectations are regarding the pastor, because in many cases those expectations are completely unrealistic and unreasonable. The expectations of the people may not even be consistent with God’s expectations for the pastor or leader. God’s expectation is the most important if the pastor is to be successful in ministry in God’s eyes.

There are four primary passages in the Bible that speak directly with God’s expectations of pastoral ministry, Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34, John 10 and I Timothy 3. Much can be gleaned from each of these passages regarding *the marks of good and faithful ministry*. God addresses both aspect of ministry in these passages. He addresses the “GOOD” aspect, which primarily deals with the character of the minister. He also addresses the “FAITHFUL” aspect, which focuses on the function of ministry.

Marks of a “Good” Ministry

Obviously if a minister is to represent the ministry of Christ, the Good Shepherd, that minister must have the character of Christ. This means that the minister will possess the same fruit of the Spirit that is to be evident in the life of every mature believer in Christ (Gal. 5:22-23). The leader must possess these qualities in his life to the degree that he can be an example to the congregation in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith and in purity (I Tim. 4:14). These qualities are reflected in but not limited to the following:

1. A person with a strong personal relationship to Jesus Christ (I John 1:1-4) who continues to grow in maturity year after year (Ps. 1).
2. A person with a strong personal devotional life in prayer and the word (Acts 6:4).
3. A person who reflects a model of Christianity, who maintains a balanced lifestyle, devoted to God, to his family, to his calling and to world evangelization.
4. A person of integrity in all of his dealing maintaining a good report both within and outside of the church.
5. A person who has been able to count the cost of following after the call of God and is not covetous or motivated by a love of money, position or power.
6. A person who is temperate in all things and not dominated by personal addictions that will influence decisions and pursuits.

7. A person of diligence who is self-motivated and able to discipline his time to accomplish God's divine purpose with or without daily accountability.
8. A person of moral courage who fears God more than he fears man so that he can stand up for convictions in the face of potential opposition and persecution.
9. A person with a servant spirit and a genuine heart of love for people who is sensitive to their spiritual, emotional and physical needs and has a willingness to lay his life down for others.
10. A person who has a deep sense of the call of God that serves as the fundamental basis for what he is doing.

Marks of a "Faithful" Ministry

In addition to being good, every ministry must be faithful. Every minister should covet Christ's ultimate commendation of the good and faithful servant (Matt. 25:21). Faithfulness involves being true to the functions of pastoring. If you examine the Scripture you can find a nine-fold job description for the true shepherd. They can be summarized as follows:

1. **Feeding the Sheep** (Ezek. 34:2, 13-15). This involves preparing and delivering sermons and other teachings that will strengthen the people of God and lead them into a deeper relationship with God and a fulfillment of their God-ordained function.
2. **Leading by Example** (I Pet. 5:3). This involves practicing what is being preached to give the people a living example to follow (Phil. 3:17).
3. **Watching over the Flock** (Acts 20:28). This involves knowing the state and the spiritual needs of the people so that the pastor can give them "meat in due season."
4. **Reaching Out and Delivering the Needy** (Ps. 23:1). This involves mobilizing the saints to assist in meeting real needs both within the church and outside of the church family to be sure that they are not lacking.
5. **Equipping the Saints for Ministry** (Eph. 4:11-12). This involves being committed to the maturation of each believer to the point that they themselves are functioning fully in the call that God has for them in their lives as members of the Body of Christ.
6. **Protecting the Sheep** (Ezek. 33:6). This means guarding the flock against false doctrine, relational conflicts and even themselves in areas that might hinder them from becoming successful.
7. **Training and Raising Up other Leaders** (Tit. 1:5-6; II Tim. 2:2). This involves a commitment to multiply the ministry of the pastor by identifying, encouraging, training and releasing others into the functions of pastoral ministry.

8. **Keeping Himself Pure** (Acts 20:28). This involves an understanding that the pastor needs to maintain himself spiritually, emotionally, educationally, socially and physically before he can minister effectively to others.
9. **Giving Account to the Great Shepherd** (Heb. 13:17). This involves operating under the constant awareness that the sheep all belong to God and that every minister will have to give an account to God for what they do with this stewardship.

It is easy to see that “the shepherd is one who provides full and complete care for all of his sheep” (Adams).

What habits and practices sustain good ministry over time?

When you fully understand the demands on the life of the pastor, it can be very overwhelming. If a pastor or leader is truly conscientious it would be very easy to “burn himself out” in an attempt of please God and “do it all.” In order to achieve life-long success pastors must pace themselves in the task and realize that even God understands their frailty and personal limitations. There are some things that can assist the pastor in having a well-lived life that is not strained and susceptible to failure.

1. **Pacing.** The pastor needs to realize that Rome was not built in a day and neither will his church. Pastoring is a life-long journey that begins one step at a time. The most successful ministries are those who walk (not sprint) in one direction for a long time. This means working at a pace that can be maintained for the long haul.
2. **Balance.** The pastor needs to realize that God does not expect him to put his family, friendships, health and personal interests on the altar of his ministry. God wants the pastor to be a successful spouse, parent, citizen and neighbor. Ministry is not to be the idol that everything else serves, it is one aspect of the minister’s life that must be kept in balance with the other aspects of his life.
3. **Delegation.** The pastor needs to realize that he cannot possibly do all that God desires for him to do in relationship to His people. The pastor must learn how to bring others into his work and to delegate to others those functions that can be delegated. Most pastors could delegate far more than they realize. This is not to be seen as using people for their own ends but actually releasing people into their function as members of the Body of Christ. The pastor cannot delegate his personal prayer and life in the Word.
4. **Sabbath Rest.** The pastor needs to realize that no matter who you are or how gifted you are, you need times to pull away from the work. In Israel there were days of rest, weeks of rest and even years of rest that were all prescribed by God. Rest is not to be seen as unproductive but it must be viewed as that which brings the needed refreshing to go the next leg of the journey. Pastors should not feel guilty about days off, family vacations, occasional sabbaticals or relaxing hobbies. These things are part of the balance that will keep the pastor refreshed, on track and able to endure for a lifetime of effective ministry.

5. **Peer Level Relationships.** The pastor must realize that he needs friends and social relationship just like everyone else. It is so easy for the pastor to have relationships solely based on need. If the pastor is not careful, all of his social relationships will be nothing more than an extension of his pastoral ministry rather than true friendships. But the pastor needs true friends who can minister to and nurture his soul as well just by virtue of their presence in his life.
6. **Prayer Support.** The pastor needs to realize the importance of having a team of people who stand with him in spiritual warfare. Paul begged the believers to pray for him (I Thess. 5:25). Every pastor needs those who will keep him up before the Lord in prayer and who will be as an Aaron and Hur to him, holding his hands up during the battle (Ex. 17:12).
7. **Accountability.** The pastor needs to realize that no one is designed to stand alone. Even though the pastor is part of a church with many other people, the pastor needs peer relationships that are built on trust where he can be challenged in areas that are characteristic pitfalls for pastors. It is difficult for pastors to have such relationships with those who are under their charge, the same way it would be difficult for a parent to be accountable to their own child.
8. **Growth Opportunities.** The pastor needs to realize that to stay sharp and alive in his ministry he needs to continue to challenge himself in growth areas. This means he needs to continue to grow spiritually by participating in activities that feed his personal spirit-life. This also means that he needs to grow educationally by expanding his knowledge and honing his ministry skills by pursuing continuing educational experiences.
9. **Cross-pollination.** The pastor needs to realize the value of rubbing shoulders with other ministries who are trying to accomplish the same things. Someone once said, "The man who lives alone, thinks his own thoughts." Living in isolation is dangerous and keeps us from valuable mental and spiritual stimulation. We are stimulated and challenged by others who do not think exactly like we do about everything. Pastors need to be in situations at times where they will hear and have to interact with new concepts and ideas.
10. **Maintenance of Personal Disciplines.** The pastor needs to realize the critical importance of maintaining a strong personal relationship with God at all times. It is so easy to get caught up in the tasks of ministry that we lose the reason and purpose for the ministry. The pastor needs to maintain a vital and living relationship with his Savior. That relationship will be the wellspring from which others will drink. If that well runs dry, the pastor will lose his ability to impact others.