

Shepherding God's Church

J E F F V A N G O E T H E M



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Shepherding Series: Book 1

Shepherding God's Church

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Introduction

Some years ago, I entered an African country on one of my many trips to the continent. I arrived through an airport, which can turn into a complicated event since airport personnel routinely examine luggage to make sure nothing dangerous or questionable comes into their country. I hoped, as always, to make my way through the customs process quickly. This particular country was experiencing a lot of political and economic turmoil at the time of my visit, with its people hurting and suffering, making it likely my entry would go slowly.

As I moved along, expecting to join a long line and experience a longer wait, I looked up, surprised to see a large man in a dark blue suit holding a sign with my name on it. I didn't recognize him although I had visited this country and its small airport on prior trips. What did he want with me, I wondered?

It turned out this man served as a security official for the government. He introduced himself, explaining he had a friendship with the pastor who invited me to come. I found myself ushered through customs in record time, the security official carrying my luggage and

serving my needs. Everyone treated me like a VIP (Very Important Person), treatment I normally don't receive!

After finishing the customs process and greeting our mutual pastor friend, I turned to ask my helper why I received this kindness. The security official told me the pastor had done him some kindnesses. He wanted to return the favor.

Later I learned the pastor's church reached out to families in this official's neighborhood at Christmastime and held a party for the children, giving them small gifts. The security official appreciated these actions. He began attending the pastor's church and talking with him about matters of faith in Christ.

Despite his high position this official hurt in his heart, like many people, and wrestled with questions about the problems in his life. The kindness of a pastor and church touched him and drew him in.

I believe in the church, I believe in the gospel, and I believe in God's love. People come to God's church through many doorways, the doorway of kindness representing one of them. But what do we do with them once they join the church? How do we care for and shepherd them as members of God's flock? *What is the job of a pastor?*

I have seen many growing churches in Africa. They excite me, offering evidence of God's work there. A desire to bring just a small bit of help to the many hardworking and dedicated pastors I meet in various countries keeps me returning to Africa.

I have served as a pastor myself for over thirty-five years and, Lord willing, will continue. God blessed me with excellent training and a lifetime of study. I hope the thoughts expressed in this book help all pastors think about these questions: "What is a pastor?" and "How do pastors shepherd people?" May the following story, told through the eyes of my fictional character, Immanuel, provide blessing and help to all who read it.

Chapter One:

A Desperate Need

Young Immanuel yanked cassava roots from the soil, sweating in the heat of the dry season. The basket felt heavy meaning he could soon take it to his mother and head to the river. Immanuel's village sat far from the cities of his African country, but plenty of activities occupied his attention. Fishing, watching crops grow around his family's home each year, especially when good rains came, and helping his mother with family chores filled his time. He very much enjoyed going to school with the other children as well.

Immanuel caught a smile from his mother as he plopped the basket at the fire pit before rushing off to meet his friends. His mother taught him much about life and about himself. For instance, she taught him the story of his own name, that it came to him because of his birthday—Christmas day. Immanuel didn't know much about Christmas, just that the church celebrated it as a holiday, but he knew it gave him his name.

Church didn't occupy as much of Immanuel's thinking as fishing did. His mother attended church on many holidays. She had friends there. Immanuel learned a few basics as he listened to her talk. He knew that many years earlier people called missionaries came to the village and built the church. He knew this as a fact, but it didn't mean much to him as he didn't know the definition of a missionary.

Immanuel enjoyed listening to the singing when walking by the church, but still, he never went in. The pastor, an old man, lived on the other side of the village. Immanuel knew very little about him. Compared to the rest of village life, church just didn't capture his attention.

As the seasons turned, Immanuel focused on his work at the village school. To his benefit, Immanuel's father paid the required fees from his business of keeping cows and goats. Immanuel learned to read rapidly. His teachers often called on him to read aloud.

School ended for him at age thirteen when he left to help his father tend the animals. He continued to read any book or other written material he could find. He felt hungry for words and learning.

Over time, Immanuel grew into a slender and healthy young man. People in the village

noticed how he moved quickly and with agility while tending his father's cows and goats. His life now revolved around these animals and occasional opportunities to read, which brought him contentment. One day, however, a request from his mother changed his life forever.

“Immanuel, will you come to church with me for Easter? A special gathering is planned for a visiting missionary.”

Immanuel's curiosity stirred. “What missionary?”

“I don't know,” his mother replied. “I think he traveled here from another country. Just come with me.”

Immanuel agreed. He liked new things and the village rarely entertained visitors from the outside world.

On Easter Sunday Immanuel and his mother noticed a large crowd when entering the church—about forty adults, with children settling in front. Singing filled the air as Immanuel looked around. There in front of the church, off to the side in the place of honor, sat a large man in nice clothes. He strained to get a better look at him. The old, windowless church, with its row of bare light bulbs dropping from the ceiling, didn't give him much help. He allowed his eyes to adjust. The children sitting on the floor in front had the

same idea. They frequently shifted their eyes to look intently at the visiting guest. Immanuel observed him smiling and enjoying the singing.

The guest eventually rose to talk, speaking in a strange language. One of the village school teachers translated.

“How many know the meaning of this special day?” the guest asked. “How many know what Easter means?”

Immanuel heard murmurs of approval and saw nodding heads in response to these questions. He felt uncomfortable. First, this sitting in church felt strange and new. Second, he didn’t know the answer to the guest’s questions. He ignored his discomfort and listened as the speaker told a story to answer his own questions.

“Easter reminds us of when Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth many years ago. His Father, God, sent him and while on earth Jesus lived a perfect life. He didn’t live as we live, since we sin frequently. Jesus lived sinless, the only human to ever do this. He did no wrong and offended no one.”

Immanuel squirmed. He remembered one of his own sins—a time when he and a friend stole alcohol from a villager’s house and got drunk. No one ever knew. Something stirred inside him. He felt guilty. He realized he lived his life

differently than Jesus. *Jesus committed no sin and offended no one.* Immanuel did both. He suddenly realized that, although most people considered him a good boy, he had done wrong.

Immanuel refocused on the missionary. “Jesus attracted a crowd of followers,” he said, “and they saw him perform miracles. He taught these followers about God. After a time, men who felt jealous of Jesus arrested him, put him on a cross, and killed him.”

Immanuel fidgeted again as he listened to the missionary describe his terrible death. But the missionary brought good news from the story as well.

“As awful as this suffering of Jesus sounds, it brought us good. God allowed Jesus’s death to pay the penalty for all our sins. Everyone’s sin,” the guest emphasized. “Like a father who steps in front of his child to protect her when a wild animal pounces, Jesus stepped in front of us to receive God’s judgment for us. Because of this our sins can be wiped away.”

Immanuel pondered these words. They made sense to him and he wanted to hear more. He thought about the reason the missionary gave for this death. The missionary said God did this because Jesus loves every person on the earth.

Why else, thought Immanuel, would someone do this, but for love? He marveled at the fact that after this horrible death, Jesus rose from the dead. He showed power over death itself. Easter, he learned, celebrated Jesus coming to earth, Jesus dying to pay our debt, and Jesus showing power over death.

The missionary then explained something even more amazing. Immanuel soaked in his words.

“Everyone who believes in Jesus and follows him will go to heaven to live with him one day. All who choose not to believe will go to hell, a very bad place. I invite you to reach out and take this gift of forgiveness from Jesus. You cannot earn or pay for this, but you can accept it as a gift.”

Immanuel instantly wanted this gift but didn't know how to take it. How could he accept this forgiveness?

The missionary sat down, and the school teacher stood to speak. “If you have questions, please stay. Come up here after we finish, and we will talk to you while the others go out and prepare food.”

Immanuel stood still while people left the church. A few people slowly walked to the front. He knew some of them. He glanced at his mother

as she turned to leave, calling greetings to her friends. He started to follow, but thoughts of hell returned to his mind. He changed direction and went to the front instead. For some reason he kept his eyes to the ground as he walked, stopping in front of the school teacher.

“Immanuel, do you want to believe in Jesus?”

Immanuel remained silent, his eyes still on the ground.

“Immanuel, why did you come up to the front?”

Again, Immanuel remained silent. “Pastor, come here,” Immanuel heard the school teacher say.

The old, bald village pastor, wearing a worn black suit and narrow red tie, joined them and quickly understood.

“Is this the boy from the rocky end who keeps the animals?” he asked the school teacher.

“Yes.”

“Boy,” said the pastor, “you must pray to receive Jesus, so he can save your soul. Is this your desire?”

Immanuel nodded.

“Come then, follow my lead. ‘Lord Jesus, I am a sinner, thank you for dying for me, I believe in you.’”

Immanuel repeated the words, believing them without any doubt.

“Good,” said the pastor. “Now you must come to church *every* Sunday and start living a life of obedience to Christ. We will baptize you soon.”

Immanuel nodded his head quickly and turned to leave. Suddenly he felt a big hand on his shoulder. He looked up and saw the missionary, who spoke to him in his strange language. The kindly face smiled at him. The missionary seemed pleased, and this pleased Immanuel. The next thing he knew a Bible sat in his hands. From the gestures of the big man, Immanuel could see it came as a gift.

Immanuel took a big breath. Wow! A book, his own book. A Bible, in his own language!

Immanuel had only seen one Bible before, in the school. He knew little about it except that it told the story of Jesus. He felt excited and anxious to learn more about Jesus. His body seemed weightless as he walked outside. Something big had happened inside him—peace had taken over his heart. He knew his sins were forgiven.

Later that evening, the missionary showed the “Jesus Film”¹ outside the church, reflected off a big sheet tacked to a wall. Immanuel grew more amazed at how much Jesus did and how he loved people.

The next week and in the weeks following Immanuel did as the old pastor said. He went to church each Sunday. As time went along, he started visiting the pastor's house once a week to read the Bible with him. Other young people joined in. The old pastor really knew Bible stories and had a wonderful way of telling them.

Immanuel still found his mind full of questions, however. What did these stories mean? How did they all fit together? He longed to gain understanding. He reviewed what he knew in his head:

- Jesus loves me. He died for me.
- My sins are forgiven.
- Jesus has power.
- I can pray to God for help.
- God is stronger than the devil, but I must stay away from the devil and his activities.
- I should help the pastor and help those who suffer.

Immanuel tried to live in obedience to Christ, as he understood it. He often went with the pastor to visit the sick or troubled people of the village. He observed the pastor praying for them. Immanuel noticed that those he visited sometimes gave the pastor a small amount of

money, a chicken, eggs, or other things, although he never asked for any type of payment!

Immanuel kept learning and growing in his faith. He continued attending church and reading his Bible while tending the animals. Close to two years later, the pastor asked Immanuel to give the announcements each Sunday in church. Immanuel told the congregation of events and prayer requests. He let them know when preparations needed to take place for a visit from the church bishop.

Immanuel also began taking up the offering and passing out communion. He continued to go with the pastor as he visited homes, helping and praying for villagers. The little church grew in numbers. Since the visit of the missionary, the number of people coming to the church doubled. Even Immanuel's mother now came every Sunday instead of only on holidays. Then suddenly, everything changed again.

Chapter One: Questions

1. Immanuel lived a contented life taking care of his father's animals. Yet when he went to church on Easter and learned about Jesus his life and beliefs changed. Immanuel knew he needed forgiveness for his sins. If you had been in the church with Immanuel, would you have left or walked to the front with him? Why?

2. Do you understand the prayer Immanuel prayed with the teacher and pastor? Have you prayed this prayer?

3. After praying for forgiveness, Immanuel became hungry to know more about Jesus. To do this he read his Bible and joined the pastor in caring for the villagers. Who can you walk beside to learn more about Jesus?

Chapter Two:

A Call to Lead

Immanuel went to his place of tending the animals and settled in for the day. Shortly after the sun reached its full height, Immanuel's mother came to him, weeping.

"Mother, what happened?"

Through her tears she replied, "The old pastor is stricken. He suffers at his house..."

Before she could finish, Immanuel took off running, his long legs carrying him quickly to the pastor's house. When he arrived, a villager met him at the door. "I am sorry," the villager said. "Our pastor died. We called for the bishop to come help us, but you also must say something for his funeral." Immanuel felt heaviness in his heart as he returned to the animals.

The following day two older men of the church came to his house and spoke to him. "If the bishop agrees, you must take over as the new pastor. We already decided, and the church members agree." Immanuel listened as they continued.

"You have the best skill for reading the Bible in church. You have lived faithfully and obediently

since believing in Jesus. You know how to visit people and pray.”

The men paused, looking intently at Immanuel. “All the people agree with this. God is calling you.”

Immanuel left to tend to his father’s animals, his thoughts churning. He reviewed the words the men said to him over and over, sensing they would change his life.

On the day of the funeral Immanuel read from the Bible and said a few words. He didn’t find this too difficult. Although the bishop talked a long time, Immanuel only spoke briefly and then prayed, thanking the Lord for the life of their pastor.

After the service Immanuel longed to ask the bishop what to do, but he felt uneasy. His mind contained many questions, especially as he realized Sunday came in only three days. What should he do on that day? What should he say? Immanuel had doubts. How could he take his pastor’s place? His pastor friend spent years and years doing this work and he did it well.

Immanuel pondered his life thus far. He knew how to read, he knew how to tend his father’s animals, and he knew a little about a pastor’s life from following his pastor as he worked. Deeper questions nagged at him. What would it mean

to act as a shepherd to God's church? How did a person become a good teacher and leader? How should he live his life in this new role and what really defined the role of a pastor?

Immanuel had more questions than answers. His anxieties rose, and he wondered if he could do what the men asked of him. Surely someone else could take care of this church.

But no one else appeared. Near the end of the bishop's stay in the village he made a visit to Immanuel and confirmed the decision of the congregation. "You must take the things you learned from your old pastor and do them. I will return in a few weeks and check on you, God willing."

The bishop taught Immanuel a few practical tasks like how to deposit offerings into the church bank account. Immanuel listened, but still felt anxious about going into the little church as the shepherd of this flock of villagers.

"But Bishop," Immanuel protested. "What should I do on Sunday? What should I say?"

The bishop looked at Immanuel kindly. "Just do what your old pastor did, and you will succeed. I will pray for you."

On Sunday morning Immanuel stumbled through the church meeting, while the bishop sat

on a bench before him. Most congregants still wept over their dearly departed pastor. Immanuel joined in with them. He read from the Bible and prayed for the people. He thanked God for the promise of heaven. The usual singers led the way for congregants to join in familiar and heartfelt songs.

Immanuel felt his breath come easier. He made it through. The bishop spoke to him as he prepared to leave, adding an afterthought.

“Immanuel,” he said, “in one of the larger villages nearby you will find a class for church leaders like yourself, taught by an experienced teacher with Bible school training.”

The two men who asked Immanuel to lead the church echoed the bishop’s words and told Immanuel where to find this class. Immanuel knew he could easily ride his bicycle twenty kilometers to the meeting place and back. The path went only a few kilometers down the dusty narrow road from his own village to the main road, which led to the larger village. He could arrange for other members of his family to watch his father’s animals every Monday.

Immanuel felt excited about this chance to learn how to shepherd God’s church. If God did call him, perhaps God would now show him how to accomplish the tasks of this new calling.

3. Immanuel saw that God provided some answers. God asked him to do something new, but then gave him a place to learn how to do this new thing. When have you trusted God to help you take on a new or unexpected task?

Chapter Three:

A New Identity

Immanuel eagerly pedaled his bike to the village, wondering what the experience of learning from a Bible teacher would bring. He soon found the bare-walled, unused schoolroom set aside for the class. Immanuel chose a seat at one of the old desks with the seat attached, adjusting his long legs underneath. He noticed about nine students from other small villages settling into desks around him, and the teacher standing up front.

Immanuel slipped his Bible onto the desk, glad he had packed it. He noticed several other students carried Bibles as well.

“Welcome. God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good!”

The teacher’s greeting brought a smile to Immanuel’s face. He took out paper from inside his Bible and a pencil from his pocket. He didn’t want to forget anything he might learn today.

“Our subject today will focus on the activity of a shepherd in God’s church. What, exactly, does a shepherd of God do?”

Immanuel gripped his pencil expectantly. This subject might help answer his questions!

“Open your Bibles to the book of Acts, chapter twenty,” said the teacher. He held up his own Bible. “We will learn from the Bible, God’s Word. We do not concern ourselves with what men say or what the world around us says. As shepherds of God’s church, we must follow God’s Word. We will study from it and from it alone.”

The teacher laid his Bible back on the podium. “Some people, including leaders and shepherds, don’t follow the Bible as closely as they should. If we listen to too many voices, we get confused. We must focus on what the Bible says so our thoughts remain clear.”

Immanuel touched the pages of his Bible with new respect. More than ever, he thirsted to fully understand the words of this book.

“Let’s talk about leaders of churches and what people call them. You came here because you lead a church. Some people will look at you and call you pastor or evangelist while others might call you church leader, bishop, or elder. You may hear other names as well.” The teacher tapped his Bible. “But in the original language of the New Testament portion of the Bible,

only three words describe the work of the local church shepherd. We see all three words in this twentieth chapter of Acts. Each word tells us a different way in which we shepherd a church.”

What is an Elder?

Immanuel followed along with the teacher as he read Acts 20:17. ““Now from Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.’

“The apostle Paul, while traveling, wanted to call together the church leaders. Here he identifies them as elders. This word refers to those who are mature—experienced in life. It doesn’t refer to age, because some older people don’t show maturity in the way they live, as we all know.”

Immanuel chuckled with the other students. He felt relieved to know this word didn’t refer to age since he hadn’t lived many years himself.

“Young men, such as Timothy, served as church leaders. We read about them in the New Testament. The term elder refers to a person who seems older and wiser even if he is young in years. A shepherd of God’s church must show maturity and wisdom no matter how many years

he may have lived. Others can look up to and learn from him.”

Immanuel wondered if he showed these qualities. He didn't have much experience, after all. He listened as the teacher taught the next word used for church leaders.

What is an Overseer?

The teacher read Acts 20:28. “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for [or shepherd] the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”

The teacher looked up. “Paul talks to the same men he gathered together in verse 17, but this time he calls them overseers instead of elders. The word means what it says. Overseers oversee the activity and ministry of the church. They hold responsibility for what goes on in the church, such as planning activities, deciding how people in the church serve, watching how church money gets used, and choosing what people in the church will learn.”

The teacher stepped to a blackboard behind him and wrote a list. “This list represents many of the responsibilities the New Testament gives to overseers of the church.”

Immanuel carefully wrote down the list. He made a note to look up all the verses the teacher supplied when he returned to his village:

- Make recommendations about correct teaching and Christian living (Acts 15:2-22).
- Properly care for church money (Acts 11:29-30).
- Supervise those who serve in the church (Acts 15:22; 21:18).
- Teach the Word of God to the people (1 Timothy 5:17).
- Guard the flock from error and false teaching (Acts 20:29-31).
- Pray for the sick (James 5:14).
- Provide a godly example to the flock (1 Peter 5:3).
- Serve humbly with other leaders in the church (Acts 14:23; 1 Peter 5:1-3).
- Earn the respect of the congregation (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:7, 17).

The teacher turned back to the class. “We clearly see from the New Testament that serving as an overseer of the church carries important responsibilities. Our work includes keeping watch over the flock, who will look to us for guidance. Listen to Hebrews 13:17. ‘Obey your

leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls. . .’

“Now listen to James 3:1. ‘Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.’ This exhorts us to *carefully* shepherd God’s church!”

The teacher sat down in a chair and faced the students. “We could say church leaders, such as yourselves, work as under-shepherds, those doing service to the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus alone is the Chief Shepherd. Like all bosses, the Chief Shepherd will one day check the work of those who serve under him. The Bible reminds us that the Lord Jesus bought each and every member of the flock with his own blood, which he shed on the cross. Remember Acts 20:28? The end of that verse clearly states this fact. Jesus purchased the flock of God with a great price and cares deeply for it. So must we.”

Immanuel felt his pulse quicken. He made a mental note to keep vigilant, to care well for his portion of God’s flock.

“We should never serve just to get money or to gain anything else,” the teacher explained. “Never lead with a domineering spirit, but instead lead as an example to the flock. Guide

them with gentleness, managing and caring for the church in the right way. Let's look at a few more verses."

Immanuel followed along in his Bible as the teacher read:

"Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:2-4)

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. (1 Timothy 5:17)

"Even though this work carries serious responsibilities, the Lord Jesus promises to mightily reward those who do it, one day giving leaders an 'unfading crown of glory' (1 Peter 5:4) when he returns."

The teacher stood up, still holding his Bible. "Remember, all of you, the Lord Jesus loves

his flock with a special love and he appreciates those who carefully lead and nurture it. In John 21:15-17, Jesus instructs the apostle Peter three times to tend—or shepherd—his sheep. We should all seek to please Jesus in our labors and not seek to please ourselves.”

The teacher smiled. “We have studied a lot already today. Let’s break for tea.”

Immanuel’s mind raced as he sat outside reviewing his notes. He had not heard these teachings before. He wondered if a young man such as himself could accomplish all this. Immanuel thought about his old pastor. He could see how he lived out many of the qualities the teacher described:

- He lived a life of gentleness.
- He did not seek money from people.
- He sometimes spoke firmly to those who lived sinfully or taught falsehoods.
- He was strong, but humble.

Immanuel remembered a time when the pastor confronted a villager living in sin. He remembered his own surprise and embarrassment as the pastor spoke sternly to the person. Now Immanuel understood. He realized his pastor desired to fulfill his duty as

a shepherd, living and teaching the Christian faith in the right way, while gaining the respect of the community. Immanuel now felt sorry for his reaction of embarrassment.

Immanuel put down his notes and sipped his tea. A sense of encouragement slowly flooded through him. A vision for how to work as a shepherd in God's church was building itself in his mind. He wanted to hear more. Finishing his drink, he returned to his desk and carefully laid out fresh paper.

What is a Shepherd?

The other students returned, and Immanuel could feel the expectation in the room. He silently thanked God for the chance to sit under this teacher.

“I promised to teach you three words used to describe the work of a shepherd in the church. We have talked about two already, elder and overseer. The third word is a word we have used all day—shepherd. We saw this word in Acts 20:28. This term stresses the *kind* of ministry local church leaders extend to their people. They shepherd them. Of course, this picture comes from those who tend animals, something experienced all over the world.”

Immanuel smiled to himself. Now this he knew something about, having tended his father's animals for a long time!

“The shepherd stands among the flock and leads them,” said the teacher. “The shepherd teaches his flock. He guards them from harm. This is why I said early on that a church leader must devote himself to God’s Word. We must all study and teach, and then preach to our flocks. Let’s read more verses together.

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers. (Ephesians 4:11)

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

“These passages help us understand that shepherding a flock and teaching them doesn’t mean just getting up on a Sunday and saying whatever comes into our minds. No, no, no!” the teacher emphasized. “Spend time studying and getting your thoughts clear, so you can teach the people something specific from God’s Word

every week. Shepherds dedicate themselves to studying, reading, learning, and teaching.

“Remember I told you about the young church leader in the New Testament named Timothy? The apostle Paul gives him a good reminder in the verse we just read. He tells him to handle the truth in the right way (2 Timothy 2:15). This must happen our whole life. We learn from God’s Word and this prepares us to teach each week. Many times we see local church leaders sacrificing much to get extra teaching and training, just like many of you sacrificed to get here today. Don’t forget the importance of teaching correctly and strongly. This is a big part of the job of shepherding God’s church.”

The teacher allowed time for questions and discussion as the day came to an end. Before everyone left for the week he turned to the blackboard once more. “Remember what we learned from the three names given to church leaders?” he asked as his chalk moved across the board.

- The title we receive from others is not a big matter. What we do matters.
- A leader acts as an elder, with maturity and wisdom. He counsels others well so those in the church can trust and respect him.

- A leader acts as an overseer, planning necessary church tasks and leading his church prayerfully.
- A leader acts as a shepherd. He teaches, cares for, and guides the flock.

The teacher put the chalk down and turned back to the class. “One more thing, which you may have noticed from the verses we read today. Every church should have several leaders. We don’t lead alone. Remember in Acts 20 the apostle Paul called together the ‘elders,’ plural, not one elder? When Paul appointed elders as we read in Acts 14:23, he appointed ‘elders’ in every church, not just one elder. The job is too big for one person.”

A student raised his hand. “Teacher, I am but one in my church. No others have come forward to lead with me.”

“Yes,” replied the teacher. “This sometimes happens. Work hard to train others as soon as you can and place them into leadership roles as soon as they understand how to lead. Shepherds lead the flock, but they also train new leaders.”

Now Immanuel understood why his old pastor met with him to study the Bible, why he took him along on many of his pastoral visits, and

why he gave him responsibilities on Sundays. He worked to train Immanuel for leadership!

Immanuel, encouraged by others' questions, felt comfortable enough to ask his own. "Teacher, my old pastor who died took me along to visit people. He read the Bible with me and he trained me to lead. But my congregation seems to think I should do everything on my own. What should I do?"

"Well, you may let that remain the case for now." The teacher leaned forward on his podium. "But think about this. Your old pastor did exactly the right thing to train you. He knew this job was too big to do alone. The larger a church grows, the more we need other leaders to help. We cannot hold such a thing to ourselves in jealousy. Training other leaders creates a healthy ministry."

The teacher looked around at all the students. "No leader will act perfectly as our Lord Jesus did. We, as humans, experience limitations. Having many leaders helps us overcome our limitations. If leaders stay unified, they show a powerful example of the unity God loves to see in his people and the whole church becomes stronger."

The teacher chuckled. "I am sure you have heard the old saying that 'two heads are better than

one.’ We don’t see people walking around with two heads, but we do know more minds considering the same problem bring more wisdom. Yes, it is good to have more than one leader. When you do, counsel each other, encourage each other, and help each other in your work.”

Now the teacher focused back on Immanuel. “So, do as your pastor did. Find others who may become leaders. Train them.”

“One final word, class,” said the teacher. “Remember, we have one Chief Shepherd, Jesus. He calls many to serve as under-shepherds. Our job remains to point people to the Chief Shepherd, our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, no matter what we do and how many people we train.”

After class, Immanuel pulled himself onto his bike and began pedaling. He felt overwhelmed! He ignored his surroundings as he turned onto the narrow, bumpy, unpaved road that led back to his village. He didn’t notice the number of goats or cows in the flocks he passed as he usually did. His mind kept getting lost in the teachings he heard in the class.

Even though he felt overwhelmed, Immanuel also felt happy to receive guidance. He understood better what his job as a new pastor required. He prayed God would help him do the

job well. Immanuel thought of his own young age, but still embraced what God called him to do. He found himself looking forward to the next Monday and thinking about how he could teach what he learned this week to his church on Sunday. His flock could learn along with him.

Chapter Three: Questions

1. When Immanuel's pastor died, Immanuel was called upon to take his position. Two men in his church told him he should replace the pastor because they saw he led a faithful life. If others watched how you live your life, do you think they would say the same about you? If not, what would you change?

2. Why is faithfulness more important than talents or gifts?

3. Immanuel jumped at the opportunity to learn how to lead the church. How can you learn more about God and shepherding the church?

4. Immanuel demonstrated great compassion for the people of his church who missed their former pastor. How did he comfort them? How do you comfort those who come to you in sadness?

5. The teacher of the Monday class stated Scripture gives leaders in the church three names. List these names. What did the teacher say matters more than a name or title?

6. Do you see leadership potential in your church? Whom could you train to help with leadership?

Chapter Four:

A New Friend

Immanuel bumped along the dirt road, thinking ahead to all he might learn in his second day of class. He walked into the now familiar room and sat in the chair he occupied the week before. Other students filed in around him.

“Hello, young man.” Immanuel turned toward a booming voice to face a large man with a very round face and even rounder belly sitting down beside him.

“You are called Immanuel, correct?”

“Yes.”

“Yes,” repeated the man with the round face, examining Immanuel up and down. “I know your village. I visited there one time, many, many years ago. I met your old pastor. Such a great loss to see him go.”

“Yes,” responded Immanuel with deep emotion.

“And,” the man continued, “you are to take his place as the new pastor?”

“Yes.”

“Well!” boomed the large man. “Good for you, and great that you attend this class. I know the teacher. He is a fine man of God.”

This warm-hearted, friendly man gave Immanuel courage to speak. “How long have you pastored?” he asked.

“Oh,” came the reply. “A long time now. I’ve pastored down in the capital city twenty-four years. I went to Bible college in that city and never left.” The man shifted in his chair to get comfortable. “My friends and I started a church with twelve people; we still meet all these years later with hundreds of people.”

Immanuel expressed surprise. “You went to Bible college?”

“Yes, for three years.”

“Then, why do you come to this class?”

“Ha, ha, ha!” The sound came from deep down in the man’s belly. He obviously knew much about joy.

“Well, my young brother, let me tell you. I found over all these years that I must keep learning. I look for places to learn. If I see an opportunity at a conference, a special class, a seminar, or whatever else might come available, I go.”

Immanuel wondered how this man traveled so much, thinking of the difficulties he would face if he went to so many places to learn. How long would his bike hold out?

The booming voice continued. “My church has grown quite large and the Lord provided a car. Now I can more easily travel. I carried two younger pastors of our denomination here with me today.”

The man picked up his pencil and straightened his paper. “We all need to learn, and I have noticed something, Immanuel. Even if I don’t learn something new, I remind myself of things I might have let slip. Just last week, for example, the teacher spoke about the need for study every time we teach the Word. I needed that reminder. Sometimes I get busy with other things—good things—like doing outreaches, caring for orphans, or raising funds I need to feed those orphans. Even though I involve myself in valuable things, I sometimes neglect my study, which doesn’t make me wise. Last week I remembered I need to spend time preparing something meaningful from God’s Word for my people each Sunday.”

The pastor set down his pencil and looked at Immanuel with his sparkling eyes. “My name is Peter.”

Immanuel marveled that Peter, with twenty-four years of pastoring experience, still desired to learn! Immanuel hoped he would

continue learning just as eagerly while serving his church.

Peter's voice sounded once more. "By the way, my young brother, what did you preach on this past Sunday?"

Immanuel answered quickly. "I used the verses our teacher went over last week. I preached on Acts 14:23. I told the people, 'Yes, I will serve as your new pastor, but notice Paul appointed elders—plural—in the church. Even though I will serve as your pastor we need many leaders in our church.'"

Immanuel felt excitement as he continued telling Peter the contents of his sermon. "I also mentioned Acts 20:28 and taught how we must stay aware of the work of the Holy Spirit as he raises up and selects leaders for the church."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Peter. "You seem humble. If you give your people something clear and simple like this every Sunday, God will certainly use it. Your church will grow strong!"

Peter's enthusiasm and fervor struck Immanuel and he immediately recognized what an important gift the Lord gave him. He could learn much from a man like Peter. Immanuel thanked God silently for this new friend.

The classroom filled up and the teacher moved to the front of the room. The students immediately quieted down.

“Let’s begin,” instructed the teacher. “Today I want to start with three great priorities for those who shepherd God’s church.”

Immanuel planted his feet on the floor and sat ready with his pencil, paper, and Bible. If Peter could keep learning after all his years as a shepherd, Immanuel needed to pay careful attention as a new shepherd in God’s church.

3. What lessons did Immanuel learn as he talked to Peter?

a. About the need to continue growing?

b. About teaching in church?

Chapter Five:

A Shepherd's Devotion

Devotion to God in Prayer

The teacher walked to the blackboard and wrote, “Devotion to God in Prayer.”

“This represents the first great priority of a shepherd,” he announced, turning back to the class. “We should strive to become men of prayer who seek God. The Bible shows us the lives of many great biblical shepherds like Moses, Paul, and the Lord Jesus. Each one of these men spent time with God in prayer. In fact, I counted over twenty prayers of Moses! Not only that, the Bible tells us God spoke to Moses and met with him over 120 times. This shows us that prayer and communion with God played a big part in Moses’s life. Think about how Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt. The Bible indicates he did this out of the outflow of his own prayer life.”

Immanuel took in a deep breath. Did he really understand the importance of prayer in his own life? Certainly he had observed the old pastor pray many times.

“Dear friends, act like Moses did,” continued the teacher. “The people he led respected and followed him because he spent time with God. The same will happen for us. We must devote ourselves to prayer. If you have an Old Testament, read about Moses in the book of Exodus. You will read how God mightily answered Moses’s prayers many times. Let’s seek the same thing.”

The teacher picked up his Bible and flipped through it. “Consider also the Lord Jesus. Think of how many times he went away to meet with God alone. Let’s read some verses together.” Immanuel opened his Bible and followed along as the teacher read.

“Now when Jesus heard this [about the death of John the Baptist], he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. (Matthew 14:13)

And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone. (Matthew 14:23)

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, ‘Sit here, while I go over there and pray.’ (Matthew 26:36)

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. (Mark 1:35)”

Immanuel’s heart sped up as he listened to that last verse. He had done the very same thing! He often headed out to the animals early, to spend more time talking with the Lord.

“Look at Mark 6:31,” instructed the teacher. “Not only did the Lord Jesus spend time alone in prayer, he spent time communing with his disciples just as God communed with Moses. Other verses you can look at later include Luke 5:16 and Luke 6:12.

“Remember this,” he continued. “The disciples never asked the Lord how to preach, but they did ask him how to pray! They observed the Lord praying, which made a big impression. Listen to Luke 11:1: ‘Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples

said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.””

The teacher walked down the aisles between the desks looking at each student as he passed. “We haven’t even touched on all the passages in which the Lord teaches about prayer. Someday we’ll look at those. Today we want to remember that to take care of our ministries we must take care of our own prayer lives.”

A student raised his hand. “How can we do this, teacher? Many of us need to work and take care of our families too.”

“I recommend taking your Bible with you every day and finding a quiet spot to pray where you won’t become distracted. Maybe it’s on a rock around the bend from your home. This time in prayer will help you prepare for work and care for family.”

The teacher went back to the board. “I will write out a four-part way to pray. Put this on your paper and put that in your Bible to help you remember one way to pray.”

Immanuel carefully wrote what he saw on the board:

- 1) How can I start with praise to God?
- 2) What do I need to confess to him from my heart?

- 3) For what should I thank him?
- 4) How do I need to humbly ask him for things?

After the students finished writing, the teacher began again. “In addition to this, we need to build prayer lists and pray regularly for our churches and the needs of our people. When someone asks you to pray for them, write down what they tell you, so you won’t forget. Then pray. This helps us become faithful in our praying. It also helps build our faith.”

This four-step prayer felt new to Immanuel. He prayed regularly, but usually his prayers came when he saw a need or a problem in front of him. Now he realized he must center his life on God and seek him daily through prayer no matter what was happening around him.

“Let me say this again,” encouraged the teacher. “Those who lead God’s church must devote themselves to seeking God in prayer. I’ve heard it said that God uses prayer as the appointed means for obtaining all we need from his hand. Remember our examples in Scripture. The great leaders and shepherds we read about all sought God in prayer. Other examples of prayer warriors include Samuel, David, Elijah,

Nehemiah, and many of God's prophets. If we seek God in prayer, he will help us."

Immanuel could tell the teacher felt strongly about this topic of prayer. The teacher took a breath and continued.

"Scripture promises us this, 'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you' (Luke 11:9). We should pray alone, and we should pray with our people. We must also pray with faith, believing God hears and answers us. When we do this, we place God at the center of our lives and find our way to the center of his will."

Immanuel let this sink into his mind. He had some experience with this, he realized. He prayed to understand what God wanted when the two men told him to shepherd the village church. Now, here he sat, in a class learning what that meant. God provided a new friend, Peter. Immanuel again prayed a brief prayer of thanksgiving.

Devotion to the Word

The teacher approached the blackboard once again. He erased everything about prayer and wrote, "Devotion to the Word."

"Let's not only pray but devote ourselves to the Word. Authority to lead a local church comes from

God, but such authority only remains valid and proper if we base what we say and do on the Word of God. As shepherds of God's church, *we are not:*

- tribal leaders;
- politicians;
- kings.

As shepherds of God's church, *we are:*

- living under God's government;
- following God's Word at all times;
- studying, learning, and following the Word in all we do.

“God's Word stands as the only authority. No man or woman can claim that authority. Listen to Psalm 119:89. ‘Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.’ In the New Testament Jesus said, ‘Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away’ (Luke 21:33). Therefore, our ministries must center on the Word of God.”

Immanuel wished he had brought two pencils today. Surely the one he used would turn into a stub by the end of the day. His head and his paper felt full, but the teacher had more to say!

“We can apply this in two ways. First, we need to feed our own souls on God's Word. Romans

10:17 tells us ‘faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.’ Reading and meditating on the Word of God every day makes our faith grow and teaches us how to live. Doing this also keeps us from getting discouraged or getting off on the wrong path. It keeps us from growing cold spiritually. Colossians 3:16 says ‘Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.’”

The teacher paused to make sure everyone listened to his next words. “If God’s Word doesn’t dwell in us, what can we share with others? Devote yourselves to the Word!

“Second, we realize that all our teaching and preaching finds its base in God’s Word. Our messages should come from God’s Word, not from our own opinions. Nor should we just tell stories.

“Shepherds also visit the sick and counsel with troubled people. They need us to read Scripture to them and teach them to trust in God. Shepherds teach about sin and salvation. All this ministry must stay based on God’s Word.”

The teacher leaned against an empty desk and grew more serious. “Shepherds of God’s church teach his precious Word. Remember what the great apostle Paul said to the young church leader, Timothy. ‘All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for

correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:16-17). And later we read, 'I [Paul] charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, . . . preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching' (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

"So, we not only take in God's Word to build up our own faith, we need to constantly share it with others to build their faith as well. This is what the Bible means when it talks about laboring in 'preaching and teaching' (1 Timothy 5:17). I can't state this enough: as church leaders we must build our lives and ministries on the Word of God."

Immanuel felt relieved when the teacher announced a break for tea. He didn't believe he could fit any more into his head. Peter and Immanuel took tea together.

"Did I not tell you this teacher is good?" Peter chuckled. "I'm sure you have a few sermon ideas coming out of this class already."

Immanuel nodded and rested against the building. He could think of many things to consider for himself but also many he could share with the people in his church.

Giving Spiritual Direction to Others

Immanuel and Peter returned to their seats after tea, ready to hear more.

The teacher once again took his place at the front of the room. “I know your brains may feel full after all the lessons this morning, but we can never overfill ourselves with the truth of God.”

Immanuel heard several murmurs of agreement around him.

“We talked about two directions a shepherd must take—a life devoted to prayer and a life devoted to the Word of God. So here is the third important direction for shepherding work. A local church leader receives many opportunities to give instruction and guidance to others.

“Think about all the occasions when people call on a church leader,” challenged the teacher. “He preaches on Sundays to believers and sometimes preaches to others out in the villages or streets. The very next day he may visit the sick or counsel the troubled. Perhaps he leads a Bible study or prayer meeting with members of his church. He may have to preside over a funeral, pray at a graveside, and that same week perform a wedding for a young couple. He will baptize converts and pray for God’s blessing on a newly born child. In addition, he helps

with community projects, giving leadership to important events.”

“Wow,” thought Immanuel. “Yes, to serve as a shepherd, I will have a lot to do!”

“Here is the lesson,” instructed the teacher. “Each and every one of these occasions exists as an opportunity to give spiritual direction or to show people how to recognize the will of God. Our knowledge of the Word of God needs to flow out into these events and occasions.”

As the teacher once again walked up and down the aisles, Immanuel felt each person in the room soak up the information into his own heart.

“Whether the people come to us in a time of hurt and difficulty or a time of joy and happiness, we bring God’s Word to them. In all our leadership duties we must show that we take understanding and living by the Word of God seriously. God gave us this duty, to point people to his Word, to encourage faith in Christ, and to lead people to salvation and wholesome Christian living. All these different activities share that one thing in common—through them we teach others how to live as servants of God.

“Teaching others doesn’t always happen in a direct, commanding way as when we preach. It can also happen in quiet and gentle ways,

with a loving and sympathetic spirit. A good shepherd goes among the people to show love, but also to bring the Word with him. He listens and interacts with people, sharing the Word in helpful ways. The Bible calls this discipleship. The Lord tells us to do this kind of work in Matthew 28:19 when he says, ‘make disciples.’”

Before the second class ended, the teacher asked each student to share one time they gave spiritual direction to others. Immanuel shared his experience of speaking a few words at his old pastor’s funeral. “I wanted to bring comfort and hope to the people who just lost their long-beloved teacher,” he said.

Peter spoke next. He described a time when the president of their country asked him to pray at a special banquet. Peter said, “I had to remind myself that he, like me, is just a man and needs God as all men do. I prayed for him, that he would know God and do his will.”

Another student told about a time he stood by the graveside of an infant child and read the Word, praying for the grieving couple who lost their first child.

Immanuel thought about the sadness at that graveside. How hard, to stand with a couple in so much pain. Immanuel realized the ministry of

a shepherd would include many occasions when giving spiritual direction would feel difficult.

The teacher seemed to hear Immanuel's thoughts. "Ministry can bring us to difficult situations," he said. "But God gives us strength and gives us his Word. We don't just give ourselves to people, we give them God and his Word. Do not forget that!"

Many thoughts ran through Immanuel's head as he rode home on his bicycle that Monday. The countryside went by in a blur as he focused on his inward thoughts. A car zoomed past him, but he hardly noticed.

I need to plan more often how to act as a shepherd, he purposed. Immanuel made a list in his head, like the teacher often did on the blackboard.

- 1) I need to spend time with God in prayer.
- 2) I need to spend time in God's Word.
- 3) I need to spend time preparing for the opportunities God brings me to teach.

How will I accomplish this, wondered Immanuel? He ran through his list of responsibilities, including daily chores and tending his father's animals. None of that would change. He began to see that in and around his duties

of life he must find ways to pray, read God's Word, and prepare. He had to pay attention to his occupation, but he needed to pay attention to God's business as well.

As Immanuel's bike bumped down his village road he made another list in his head.

- 1) Take a couple evenings a week and use them to prepare for the Sunday message.
- 2) Visit the sick and needy once I put the animals in their pens for the day.
- 3) Talk with my father about taking one additional day off besides Sunday, to spend this day on church activities. Maybe I could do this on Saturdays.

Immanuel grew excited. If he could arrange these times, and especially have Saturdays to devote to the ministry, he could meet with church members on that day. He could plan activities and use some of the time to prepare for Sundays.

Immanuel knew he worked the perfect job for prayer and reading the Word. On many days, once he moved and settled the animals, he could focus on these things.

Immanuel drew close to his home and felt one more thing burning in his heart. He desired to reach others with the gospel, especially young

people. Maybe he could form a team to plan outreaches in the village.

Immanuel set his bike against the wall. The ride home produced plans in his mind to help him shepherd and build up God's church. This day of class filled his notebook and his thoughts, helping him grow further into his new calling as a shepherd of God's church.

Chapter Five: Questions

1. Name the three important directives for shepherds of God's church:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

2. Of these three, which do you find most difficult to live out as you lead?

- Devotion to God in prayer.
- Devotion to the Word.
- Giving spiritual direction to others.

3. Immanuel thought about all his responsibilities and then planned how to fit the three directives into his week. Use the space below to do the same.

Work and other activities that take my time now:

Where can I fit in more time to earnestly pray?

Where can I fit in more time to diligently study God's Word?

How can I arrange my time to include actively giving spiritual direction to others?

What activities might I plan to give spiritual direction to others (for example, times of outreach or visiting with the sick)?

Chapter Six:

A Shepherd's Character

Immanuel greeted Peter as he settled into his seat for the third training session. “You have come again,” noted Immanuel.

“Yes, of course,” replied Peter. “And I have brought those young pastors with me again.” Peter introduced them to Immanuel, who quietly greeted them with a handshake. He found encouragement in noticing they didn’t seem any surer of themselves than he did!

As if reading his thoughts, Peter spoke. “It is good for us to stay humble as we all learn and grow together. No one arrives at the final destination in the Christian life until they get to heaven. Short of that, we keep maturing, that’s all.”

“Amen,” agreed the three young pastors in unison.

“Come and sit,” Peter said to his friends. “Let’s see what our teacher prepared for us today.” Immanuel felt a familiar anticipation as he laid out his Bible, paper, and two pencils, just in case.

The teacher began with a probing question. “What kind of person—what kind of Christian—must a church leader be? We’ve talked a great

deal about what a shepherd does, but who should he be? We know he lives as an example to his flock. We know Paul teaches specifics about this to the young pastor, Timothy, in 1 Timothy 5. But what kind of person behaves like this?" The teacher's eyes held a challenge and Immanuel listened carefully.

"Thankfully," continued the teacher, "God's Word gives us two long lists in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9 that answer this question. I want to share some of the highlights with you. Let's begin."

Immanuel quickly wrote down the verses the teacher mentioned, so he could read them carefully while studying at home.

Holy Desire

"Let's read 1 Timothy 3:1." The teacher's familiar voice filled the room as he read the verse. "'The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.'

"Becoming a shepherd of God's church requires a call from God. God instills a deep inner conviction in a person's soul that his life should follow this path. We just read that a desire to work as an overseer represents a good desire, powerful and long-term. This desire gets

us through the difficult days. We fight the good fight of faith because we know God wants us to. This verse makes each of us ask questions: Has God given me such a holy desire? Has my desire lasted or does it seem like only a passing thought? Have others confirmed to me that God called me to do pastoral work?"

Immanuel thought about his own journey. Yes, he thought. I desire this, God help me. I want to do this. I want to please God, save souls, and build up God's church. Immanuel remembered the day the two men called him to fill the place of the old pastor. He could see how God had already increased his desire and strengthened him with teaching since that day.

The teacher looked around at his students. "What I talk about from God's Word describes a special kind of holy ambition, to please God and care for his flock. This ambition makes us willing to strive, prepare, and grow, and it lasts a lifetime. Do each of you feel the conviction of a holy desire?"

Immanuel wrote the words, "Yes, I have a desire to serve God's church and care for his flock," on the edge of his notes, adding the date. He wanted to remember this moment as he journeyed through a lifetime of shepherding.

General Qualities

“So, now that we know we need this lifelong desire for shepherding, how does the Bible describe the qualities a good shepherd must possess and develop? The first few we might call general qualities. Let’s read some verses to learn about these. Turn to 1 Timothy 3:6. The list of qualities here actually begins in verse two, but we will jump into the middle, going straight to verse six.”

Immanuel heard flipping of pages and eagerly turned his own.

“He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil,” read the teacher. “This sits in contrast to Titus 1:7, which says an overseer, ‘as God’s steward, must be above reproach.’ Some years of seasoning prove a person’s faithfulness as a Christian leader. This seasoning provides time for a person to develop good judgment and to realize the serious and important work that makes up the job of a shepherd. A person should not jump into this job without some preparation.”

Immanuel paused to take this in, his heart unsure. I am a young man, he thought. Am I ready for this? Do I demonstrate the seasoning the teacher talks about? Immanuel rubbed his

forehead. This is a serious step, he told himself. I desire to do this work, but I still feel the need to receive confirmation from others. Even though people from the church sought him out to become pastor, Immanuel committed to talk to them again.

The teacher continued. “A shepherd ought to exhibit the ability to teach (1 Timothy 3:2) while holding ‘firm to the trustworthy word as taught’ (Titus 1:9). We talked a great deal about how the Word remains the center of ministry for church leaders. Yes, a church leader demonstrates the gift and ability to share the truth of the Word plainly with others. This may come in many settings, from preaching on Sundays to quietly reading to counseling someone with a problem.”

The teacher looked up at the class. “Many more things show up for us in 1 Timothy chapter three and Titus chapter one. I will list more general qualities on the board and give you some references, which you can read later.”

- A shepherd should keep his home in order (1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 1:6).
- A shepherd’s marriage should shine as an example to others (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6).

“I want to spend a moment here on marriage and the home. It won’t do for the leaders of God’s

church to show a bad example of family life to others. One may feel called, but without a good Christian marriage, if you are married, you cannot command the respect of others. Church leaders must guide and teach those in their own homes, demonstrating faithfulness and consistency. What does Scripture say? Look at 1 Timothy 3:5. ‘For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?’ Remember this as you live with your spouse and children. Even your family life teaches others about God and reveals whether or not you live a faithful and consistent life.

“Shepherds demonstrate a good testimony to those in the community who don’t belong to the church,” continued the teacher. “Look at 1 Timothy 3:7: ‘Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.’ A shepherd lives in his community as a good man, one who lives out honesty and integrity in all his dealings.”

Immanuel suddenly recalled an event from childhood. One day he witnessed an accident in the village. He stood, staring at a little girl, struck by a passing truck and now lying hurt on the side of the road. A crowd gathered. Many

villagers yelled at the driver and threatened him. The old pastor, whom Immanuel didn't yet know, stepped into the middle and urged calmness. He talked to the injured girl and advised those standing around to take her to the clinic. Then he stood and held up his hands to calm the arguing mob, speaking urgently and calmly to them.

Immanuel realized now that the old pastor held the respect of his village. The mob listened to him because he lived a life that built respect in the community around him. Immanuel resolved to live a life that would build that same respect from those inside and outside the church.

The teacher left the class with a challenge before dismissing them for tea. "We see from these verses that a church leader is called to live the kind of life others can and will follow. This way of living must occur within your families, your churches, and in your communities."

The teacher put his Bible down on his desk. "Take some tea and we will continue studying more specific qualities of a shepherd when you return."

Once again Immanuel joined Peter, this time along with the young pastors he met earlier. He enjoyed the opportunity to share ideas about what they all learned.

Relationships

The teacher wasted no time once all the students returned to their seats. Again, he turned to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Immanuel stuck a scrap of paper in these pages of his Bible. He knew he would want to review these passages many times.

“We will now talk about how a shepherd builds relationships,” said the teacher. “I will give you a short list with some verses to go with each item.”

Immanuel’s pencil again wore down as he copied notes from the board.

- 1) An overseer practices hospitality (1 Timothy 3:2).
- 2) An overseer acts in gentleness and not with a quarrelsome attitude or violence (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7).

The teacher focused on the second point. “The Bible tells us church leaders can’t afford to attack others or engage in unimportant disputes. When difficult situations arise, overseers should learn to resolve conflict without arguing, even if feeling provoked.”

Conviction stirred in Immanuel. He remembered times he lost his temper and argued

with other people, not considering whether his actions followed God's ways. He knew this needed to change.

"Don't ignore the first point either," continued the teacher. "Overseers offer open doors to people as much as it depends on us, so we can build good relationships with as many people as possible. After all, the church's purpose revolves around reaching people and building them up in faith.

"Think about this. Only two things last forever besides God: his Word and people. It makes sense then, to follow and teach Scripture while building relationships with people. In doing this, we focus on the eternal things God puts in our world."

Maturity

"I know you may feel tired of lists by now," encouraged the teacher. Several students in the class chuckled. "The Bible gives us much training on the life of a godly overseer. It is important that we look at this, even though we produce long lists!"

The teacher stepped back to the blackboard. The chalk scratched across the board while Immanuel's pencil scratched across his paper.

- Church leaders live sober-minded, self-controlled, and with good behavior (1 Timothy 3:2-3; Titus 1:7-8).

- Church leaders abstain from addictions to alcohol (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7).
- Church leaders keep themselves from a love of money that pulls them away from a godly life (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7).

The teacher put down his chalk and faced the class. “Let’s talk more specifically about these items. Look at the first point. How can we stay focused on our calling if we exercise rash or excessive behavior? Should we not stay under the control of God at all times? As you may have observed, a good shepherding pastor may need to minister to others any time of day or night. People around you need to know they can trust you, that you remain under God’s control and able to help. After all, your life belongs to God and to his flock. Forsake questionable and unhelpful activities and habits for the Lord’s sake. A shepherd’s life should be open and clean.”

Immanuel thought this asked a lot of a person and required a high standard. Then he thought of all the Lord Jesus sacrificed for him, a sinner. Surely, he could live a life pleasing to the Lord, available to his flock, for the sake of Jesus!

“The last two items on this list deal with alcohol and money. Many people let these things trip

them up. As shepherds and overseers, we can't afford to allow this. These common stumbling blocks deter us from a life that sets an example for godliness."

The teacher paced the aisle as he continued, a habit Immanuel grew to appreciate as it made him feel more connected to the learning process. "All of us, as church leaders, should not give in to wine. We should refrain from intoxication in any form, whether alcohol or drugs. Also, as church leaders we can't allow our hearts to become greedy for money. This calling doesn't relate to those who want wealth. If your goal is to get rich, go do something else."

The teacher looked at each student one at a time. "A shepherd of the sheep acts maturely and carefully when it comes to money. A mature shepherd sees money for what it is—only paper. A mature leader finds himself satisfied with a simple life of food, clothing, and shelter as Jesus taught. Let us learn to give thanks for what God gives us and not become greedy."

The teacher paused to emphasize his next statement. "Both money and alcohol can turn free men into slaves. Let's remain slaves only of the Lord Jesus Christ."

“But teacher,” blurted out a student. “Must a shepherd of the flock live perfectly? Who can do that?”

The teacher smiled. “I’m glad you asked that question; it is a good one! No, we cannot live perfectly, but we can hope to live above reproach. That’s the word the Bible uses here in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6. Let me give you an example of what this means. In the Old Testament, priests brought a lamb with no blemish for a sacrifice to the Lord. No lamb is perfect, but the priests looked for a lamb without any glaring defect or obvious imperfection.”

Immanuel understood this. He had spent enough time with his father’s animals to know some could fall prey to the mauling of an animal or become scarred from a run-in with a bicycle. Others looked almost perfect, with no such scars. But how did this relate to leaders?

“Leaders will not live perfectly,” clarified the teacher. “But their characters reflect the qualities we learned today. Their lives show a lifestyle that is consistently good and above reproach. That means no one can look at this leader and point out an obvious or glaring defect. Avoid the black mark of bad living and bad choices. Yes, this is a tremendous challenge. When you meet

the challenge, it also becomes a tremendous blessing.”

The class ended on a somber note as the students thought through the challenge of representing Christ to their flocks. Once again, Immanuel rode home on his bike, deep in thought. A new idea turned over in his mind. The discussions of the day brought thoughts of a wife and family, something he had put off prior to this.

Immanuel shifted on his seat. A godly wife, walking in this holy work with me—one who could advise me and share with me—would be a blessing, he thought.

Immanuel noticed families as he turned onto the village road. For the first time he took note of wives working and children playing. He imagined himself with a family. A home could provide a place to practice hospitality. It could supply a place for intimate visiting and building friendships with those who needed his help.

Immanuel reached the end of his ride and leaned his bike against the wall. I will pray about a wife, he decided, as he entered his parents’ home.

Chapter Six: Questions

1. This chapter contains descriptions of many qualities a church leader must possess. Write a short statement below each quality, describing what you think it means. If you know of other church leaders near you, discuss your answers with them.

a. A church leader possesses a holy desire to serve as a shepherd of God's church:

b. A church leader is a seasoned, mature believer:

c. A church leader demonstrates the ability to teach:

d. A church leader keeps his home in order:

e. A church leader shows a good example of a godly marriage to those around him with his actions, such as cherishing his wife:

f. A church leader lives a life of godliness in his community:

g. A church leader builds good relationships and acts in gentleness to those around him:

h. A church leader grows in maturity through his life:

- i. A church leader chooses freedom from losing control to alcohol or other drugs:

- j. A church leader doesn't seek to become rich from his service:

2. One student asked if a church leader must live a perfect life. How did the teacher answer this question?

Chapter Seven:

A Shepherd's Example

Immanuel didn't climb on his bike the following Monday and ride to class. Instead he did the work of a shepherd. An elderly woman from his village died. Immanuel had visited her on several occasions while she struggled with illness, reading the Word and praying with her. This woman lived her life as a dear, trusting Christian.

Immanuel missed attending class, but he knew the tasks ahead of him related to why he went to class to begin with. He must shepherd his flock in hard times, such as now.

Immanuel mounted his bike and pedaled to the home of the woman's family. He read the Word and shared some promises about heaven. He helped prepare for the funeral and burial. He talked with ladies in the church about bringing food to the grieving family. He asked the treasurer of their little congregation for church funds to help purchase food and a gift.

Later in the week Immanuel took charge of the funeral service. Using what he learned in class, he studied the Word and found six excellent

promises about heaven, which he shared with the gathered mourners.

The people of the village noticed he spoke with compassion and sympathy. His voice rose, and faith shone like a light in the dark when he talked of heaven and the coming return of the Lord.

After walking beside this family, speaking at the funeral, and comforting those who attended, he felt quite exhausted. Immanuel felt more tired than he did after tending his father's animals for a day! He realized each time a pastor ministers to others he pours out his soul for them.

The following Monday Immanuel returned to class. He pulled out his Bible, paper, and pencil, as usual, while waiting for other students to arrive.

The teacher started the class in an unexpected way. "Today, class, we will not look at the Bible as intently as we have in previous weeks. Today I will tell you an interesting story about a famous pastor in history, which touched my heart."

Immanuel enjoyed stories. He didn't pick up his pencil but sat attentively in his seat, ready to listen and learn about this other pastor's life.

The teacher pulled a desk to the front of the room and sat down. "I want to tell you about a well-known pastor named George Muller. This pastor lived in the 1800s. Many books have been

written about him and he wrote a few books himself. When people think of George Muller they think of a man of prayer. Beyond that, he lived as a simple, dedicated pastor who cared for his flock and served the Lord.²

“George grew up in Germany, living a wild sort of life, frequently embarrassing his family,” said the teacher. “He admitted to stealing, lying, and gambling. He didn’t learn about the Bible in his home at all and attended church on only a few occasions. About the time he turned twenty a friend of his invited him to a Bible study. For some reason, even though he had no interest in such things, he decided to go.

“George felt surprised that strangers greeted him so warmly. The meeting followed a simple order. The group sang a hymn, one of the people knelt to lead in prayer, and finally, a passage of Scripture was read and discussed.

“George felt especially struck by the prayer. He had never heard a prayer like this one. It was not memorized from a prayer book but came from the heart as if the person spoke to someone he knew well. God worked powerfully in George’s life through this experience. Soon he began attending Bible study regularly. In a short time, he accepted the Lord and started growing as a Christian.”

That's like me, thought Immanuel. I didn't live a wild childhood, but I accepted Jesus as a young man, just like this pastor, George Muller. He leaned forward in his seat, wanting to hear more.

"George read much about missionaries, believers who take the good news of Jesus Christ to new places," continued the teacher. "He thought of becoming a missionary and studied the Bible at a university in Germany. He began preaching in England in his mid-twenties and when he turned twenty-seven years old he moved to Bristol, England, to serve as a preacher in a church. He didn't become a missionary but served as a pastor until he died at ninety-two years of age."

Immanuel heard murmurs among the students. He joined in, marveling that a pastor would pour himself out this way for over six decades.

"That tells you a little of his life and death," said the teacher. "But George Muller became most known for work he did with orphans and Christian schools. He established 117 schools, providing Christian education to more than 120,000 children. His orphanages cared for over 10,000 children during his lifetime.

"Remember when we talked about not falling into the trap of loving money? Listen carefully. George held to a strict rule against fund raising

in his ministries. He determined early that he would not solicit gifts or offerings for his church, schools, or orphanages. What did he see happen? God miraculously supplied all needs without George ever taking on any debt! He also received money which he gave to missionaries. George prayed for his needs and God provided. George is now considered one of the great men of prayer in all of Christian history.

“When he turned seventy he began traveling to many countries in the world—over thirty countries.” The teacher paused. “What really interests me? He often spoke to pastors during his travels. He gave the same message everywhere he went because he felt strongly about the role of a shepherd in God’s church. He taught ten strong statements about pastoring.”

The teacher stood up and picked up some chalk. “I think you will want to write these down,” he said. “They should sound familiar to you by now. I will put the list on the board and briefly discuss each point.”

1) A pastor must be truly converted.

“The Bible urges us to make sure our faith is correct before we accept the yoke of spiritual leadership,” the teacher explained.

“We need to be truly born again of the

Spirit and have a sound and sure belief in Jesus Christ. We cannot give someone else what we don't have ourselves, can we?"

The teacher turned to face the class. "Do you comprehend that:

- we receive salvation only through faith in Christ, by God's grace alone;
- Christ died and rose from the dead to pay for our sins;
- he is the only way to heaven?"

2) A pastor must have intimate knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

"Jesus is the one we serve; the church would not exist without him. We need to know him, worship him, and serve him with all our hearts. This doesn't happen by following the practices of certain religions or belonging to a certain church. This happens because we belong to and know the Lord Jesus himself."

3) A pastor must show forth growth in happiness and love.

"Remember we talked about the qualities of a pastor? A pastor cannot succeed unless his life displays the fruit of Christian character.

This shows up as joy from the Lord, a love for God and his people, and growth as a Christian. The love and joy of Jesus must sincerely flow out of the life of a pastor.”

4) A pastor must feed his own soul.

“Pastoral ministry benefits the church and its members only if the pastor nurtures his own soul before he tries to nurture his church. How can he impart faith and love to others unless it first occurs inside his own heart? Remember our discussion about a need for time to pray and study the Word? This allows us to feed ourselves, so we may feed others.”

5) A pastor’s supreme aim must be holiness of life.

“The private life of a pastor should reflect the same life he shows in public,” said the teacher. “A pastor cannot pretend anything. He should live his life authentically and honestly, focusing on pleasing God with an obedient and holy life rather than on money, position, status, privileges, and other such things.”

6) A pastor's crowning grace must be humility.

“Numbers 12:3, in the Old Testament, tells us Moses lived a more humble life than anyone on the face of the earth. This means Moses thought about doing God’s will and serving others instead of thinking about himself. Will we live this way too?”

7) A pastor's message must be received from God.

“We can hear messages from everywhere today—from other people, from world cultures, and some from the devil. Every message a pastor gives should come from God and his Word—only. We receive the messages of God into our own hearts, apply them to our own lives, and then give them out to others.”

8) A pastor's message must expound Scripture.

“Preaching doesn’t mean yelling, following a particular style, making noise, or drawing attention to ourselves. Preaching explains the Bible in a way that allows people to understand and do the will of God.

Preaching can happen on many levels, from simple to deep. The simplest truths of the Bible will feed the souls of God's people."

9) A pastor must have scriptural convictions concerning the conduct of life in the church and eliminate methods which imitate the world.

"Simply said, pastors must take their orders and instructions from the Word of God instead of imitating the world around us."

10) A pastor must labor in prayer.

"George Muller lived out his ministry this way. Remember, prayer exists as God's appointed means by which we obtain from his hand that which we need for life and ministry."

The teacher put down the chalk and returned to his chair. "None of us can be—or needs to be—George Muller. We look at his life as an example of a godly man. We see that God chose to honor his prayers for financial needs to be met even though God may provide in many ways, such as through a salary or the raising of support for our mission work.

“Many pastors may show us how to serve as godly shepherds. I told you this story to inspire you to follow George Muller’s example and to think about what you see in the lives of other pastors like him. Then you can become a godly model for someone else to follow!”

At tea break, Immanuel walked around the side of the school and leaned against the wall in the shade. The heat and sun felt strong. As he cooled down, he raised his eyes to heaven and prayed.

“Lord,” he began, his heart submissive. “I don’t know why you called me to do this work. I see it is a high and holy thing. You know I am just a young man, but I know I love you and I love your Word. Your church means everything to me. Help me build it up and give you glory. Help me put your work first. Please take care of me and supply my needs. Thank you for saving me. Help me bring salvation to many more people in our little village. Protect your work, Lord. May the Lord Jesus shine through all your people.”

Immanuel took some tea, with a heart full of thankfulness and anticipation.

Chapter Seven: Questions

1. Immanuel missed a class to minister to a hurting family in his church. How did he apply the things he learned in class while helping comfort this family?
2. What did Immanuel realize about shepherding God's people after finishing the funeral? Do you ever feel this way?

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3. The teacher ended his class by telling his students the story of George Muller's life and his ministry to pastors. The teacher listed ten things George Muller taught pastors. Which of these ten things do you feel you need to study more?
4. Immanuel felt led to pray after so much teaching. He focused on God's calling on his life and his desire to stay humble, allowing God to work through him. Write a brief prayer of your own in response to what you learned in this book.

Conclusion

Young Immanuel began his journey by putting his faith in Jesus Christ for salvation from his sins. He then stepped onto a path that led him to become a man of prayer and a man of the Word. He committed himself to the teaching and leading of God's church—a true pastor.

Immanuel knew he started his journey as a young man and recognized he had much to learn. He took opportunities for growth that came available to him and applied every bit of the teaching he received. He planned to get the most out of his days as he served God and his people. May the Lord raise up many more like him!

Will you take on the challenge of godliness and walk in the footsteps of Immanuel? Will you choose the path of salvation and follow God, so you may shepherd others?

Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.jesusfilm.org>.
- 2 Arthur T. Pierson, *George Muller of Bristol: His Life of Prayer and Faith* (Kregel Publications, 1999), see especially pages 314 and following.

