

# IN THE WILD

## LESSONS LEARNED OUTSIDE THE SEMINARY CLASSROOM

You knew you were called and thought you were ready. But then you entered the uncharted territory of real-life ministry, where decisions aren't theoretical but affect people you care about.

In what ways has the church been your classroom?

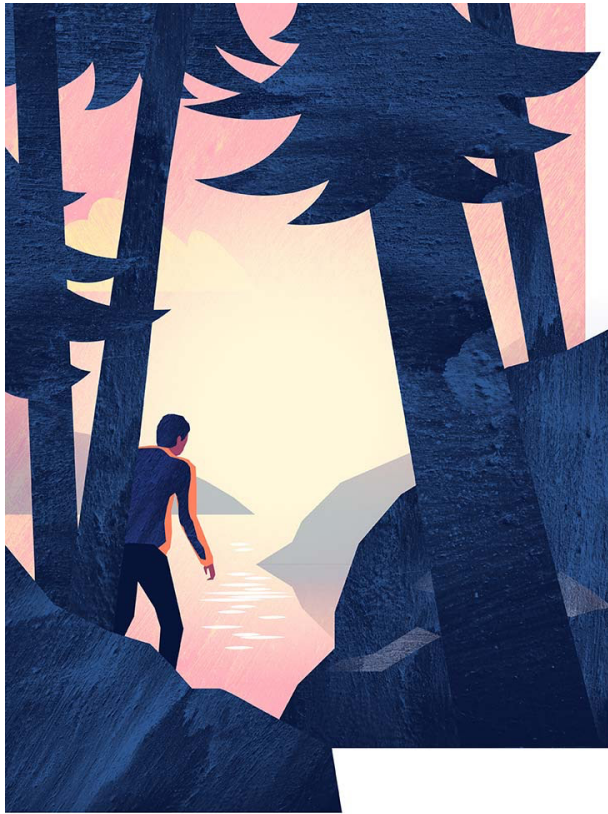
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# IN THE WILD

This is something we know: God will equip us for every path He has invited us to walk. And His presence is the best preparation of all.

God takes what we have to offer—our training, our prayers, our sense of calling, even our inadequacies and sin—and *He* does something beautiful.

Consider David's prayer in Psalm 5:

*"Listen, GOD! Please, pay attention! Can you make sense of these ramblings, my groans and cries? King-God, I need your help. Every morning you'll hear me at it again. Every morning I lay out the pieces of my life on your altar and watch for fire to descend" (Psalm 5:1-3, The Message).*

What a balm to our ever-busy souls—that we don't create the fire, the spark of the Holy Spirit. God does it. We offer all that we have. We faithfully obey. And we wait expectantly.

What do you do, then, when you realize, *I am not ready for this? I am not "enough" for this?*

In this issue we explore this reality for pastors especially—those who have learned the hard way that seminary or Bible school could never have fully prepared them for all that shepherding demands. Truly, it's on-the-job training when you're out in the wild of ministry.

If you are assured that this is where God wants you, then you remain on-course. You stay steady. And where you feel least adequate, you call upon God as David did. Then you seek more training, more input, more mentoring. Because of *course* you couldn't learn it all in a theological classroom. Your church is also your classroom. And God has prepared all the resources you need.

Even seminary leaders agree. “We see our job as getting students ready to be launched but not a final product,” says David Dockery, president of Trinity International University. “Once people get their degrees, they shouldn’t stop learning. Theological education plays a vital, foundational part and should not be discounted. But that’s not all there is.”

On-the-job training runs the gamut from stepping into family health crises and understanding a balance sheet, to managing relational conflict and ministering to the sexually broken. A pastor who earned an A in Preaching 101 also has to keep up with world events, address his own personal sin and carry a church through necessary seasons of change.

Explore with us some of those qualities and skills not necessarily mastered in a classroom but essential to the role of a shepherd—those aha moments of learning for which God is more than adequate.

*For further reading: What They Didn’t Teach You in Seminary, by James Emery White; and “The Shepherd-Rancher Divide,” also by James Emery White, published at [churchandculture.org](http://churchandculture.org).*

# THEY NEVER TAUGHT ME HOW TO BUILD A PULPIT

What I could only learn while knee-deep in local church ministry.

BY NEAL LAYBOURNE



As young Christians fresh out of seminary, my friend and I, like many, set out to turn the world upside down for Jesus. When our church-planting efforts saw fruit, we both secured rental properties in our respective cities and started Sunday worship services ... only to realize something we needed but neither of us had the money to purchase: a podium to hold our Bible and notes. We'd each have to build one, but no one had ever taught us to build a pulpit!

When ministry leaders hit major problems, it is not uncommon to think, *"I wish I had learned this in seminary (or Bible School or my church's leadership program)*. Indeed, it would be great to always be prepared for whatever arises. But this is neither realistic nor the way the Lord's leaders learn their most important lessons.

Moses received some of the finest training available—"educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22). Yet when God called him to lead the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt, he felt totally unprepared (Exodus 3-4).

But, really could Moses ever have been prepared for 10 plagues, for following a pillar of cloud and fire, for confronting a charging army with just a staff, or for getting water out of a rock? Could any classes have prepared him for the wild swings of people—ranging from radical obedience (Numbers 2:34) to intense, constant grumbling (Numbers 11)? Is it practical to think a different training system could have equipped Moses' heart to be ready for wholehearted commitment and excitement of leaders at one moment (Exodus 5-13; 15:20-21) and mutiny by the same ones at another (Exodus 32, Numbers 12)?

I firmly believe that the deepest lessons godly leaders will learn can only happen out in the wilderness of local church and mission work. That's because many of the most important lessons can only be truly understood as we humbly walk through them with Jesus. Life will always deliver more new situations than could ever be predicted or be prepared for.

## FOR EXAMPLE, SEMINARY CAN'T TEACH US "REALITY."

Young leaders head out on their mission for Jesus with incredible idealism. May that never be lost! Yet those same leaders inevitably face a rude awakening when their conclusions formed in a classroom don't produce endless revival. Perhaps the rudest awakenings, however, come when their expectations run up against *people*. You can never know (and therefore prepare for) the unexpected, delightful variety of quirky people whom God will entrust into your care. And there must be a reason so much is recorded in the New Testament about how to handle interpersonal conflict.

## BIBLE SCHOOL LESSONS WON'T SUBSTITUTE FOR EXPERIENCING GOD WHEN HE'S DOING WHAT ONLY HE CAN DO.

We know, for example, that Romans 8:28 is true. Yet we must go *through* the agony of cancer, family crises and hidden addictions with our people to genuinely learn deeper faith in God's promises and His goodness. These incredibly difficult problems seem unsolvable. Yet as we see Jesus work in ways far beyond our expectations, we experience God in a deeper way than could ever be "taught." And our confidence in Him as our provider, counselor and healer grows.

## OUR CHURCH LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS CAN'T TEACH US HOPE.

When church attendance is dropping, finances are lagging and criticism is increasing, we can become overwhelmed by discouragement and even despair. We're unable to point others toward hope when everything in us is pushing us toward cynicism or fear. And yet ... as we plead for courage, God steps in. He shows us how to reapply the Word of God in a deeper way, causing hope to arise from the ashes of our despair *even though nothing has outwardly changed*. It's what our brothers and sisters in the persecuted church experience regularly.

## SEMINARY CAN'T EXPOSE OUR DEEPEST PREJUDICES, SELFISH DESIRES OR MOST FOOLISH RATIONALIZATIONS.

Our professors certainly tried—through examples, chapel, teaching, assigned readings and mission classes. And their efforts and prayers laid very valuable groundwork. But it takes "in your face" life and heavy-duty Holy Spirit conviction (often through the direct words of a friend) to genuinely get through any leader's hidden bigotries and pockets of selfishness.

The list continues, of indispensable lessons that can only be fully grasped through time and the experiences of life as we walk closely with Jesus: standing publicly for the Bible even when its truth is not popular ... responding to the most raw questions of faith (such as the problem of evil) with emotional as well as intellectual answers ... balancing truth with compassion when counseling someone whose overwhelming life tragedy was triggered by sinful decisions.

As young pastors, my friend and I were never taught how to build a pulpit. So we each grabbed some discarded lumber, searched out some good examples and did our best.<sup>1</sup> In the process, Jesus reminded us that He will call His leaders to do things they neither imagined nor could have prepared for ahead of time. And He will go with them.

A disciple is a lifetime learner. How freeing it is that we don't have to have everything figured out before we go out to serve our Lord. In fact, it is through figuratively learning to build our own pulpits that our wise Heavenly Father matures, stretches and develops us.

*Neal Laybourne is senior pastor of Barre (Vt.) EFC.*

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<sup>1</sup> My simple handmade pulpit is still the one I choose to use today.

# IS THE ANSWER IN THE ROOM?

After you seek guidance from God, whom else do you ask?

BY BOB OSBORNE



I'm sure many of you have heard this fable:

*A mighty prayer warrior was in the path of an oncoming flood. The news media forecast the grave danger, so the prayer warrior began earnestly pleading for deliverance. A man in a pickup truck came by and offered him a ride to safety, but he decided to keep praying for God's deliverance. As the flood waters rose, someone in a row boat came by and offered to take him to higher ground. He declined and continued to pray for deliverance. Finally, as the waters rose above the man's attic, a helicopter came by and its crew offered to pluck him from his rooftop. Again, the man refused. Eventually, the flood waters swept him to his death.*

*In heaven, the man asked God why He had not answered his fervent prayers for deliverance. God paused and then answered, "I warned you through the forecast, then I sent a pickup truck, a rowboat and a helicopter. What were you expecting me to do?"*

I did not include this fable to mock prayer. It's a mighty gift from God, and our God is a prayer-answering God. I included it to cause us to think about *how* God answers prayer and, specifically, a certain kind of prayer.

If you have been a church leader for long, I'm sure you've encountered a problem you were not equipped to handle. I have been there many times. I have even prayed the prayer of James 1:5: "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (New American Standard Version).

Sometimes, after praying that prayer, leadership teams return to discussing the problem, trusting that God will somehow infuse them with wisdom beyond their own—even if no one in the room has ever faced the problem before or had any experience with the situation. But what if the answer is *not* in the room? What if God will answer their prayer in a more ordinary way—rather than by supernaturally dumping unlearned wisdom into the brains gathered there? What if He has already prepared someone *else* to help them?

Proverbs 15:22 reminds us that many advisors are valuable in our decision-making, and the very word *advisor* is defined as "typically someone who is expert in a particular field." In Acts 15, the apostles and elders in the Jerusalem church listened to input from Paul and Barnabas before rendering their decision about Gentile believers and the Law. And in Acts 6, the Twelve sought input from the greater gathering of disciples in order to help care for the poor.

A common error of those of us who serve as church leaders, I believe, is to think it's our function to know the answers. Yet there is an unlimited supply of questions. Perhaps we would better serve our churches by seeing our responsibility to be that of *finding* answers.



If all the members of the body of Christ are important to its proper functioning (1 Corinthians 12), should not some of those members having relevant gifts, skills or knowledge be invited into the process of discerning answers to the problems we face?

The most frequent, useful and important advice I give to church leaders facing significant problems is to slow down and invite others into the process. In times of crisis, quick decisions oftentimes yield undesired collateral damage—perhaps even greater than the initial crisis. By slowing down our decision-making processes, we give ourselves time to think, as well as time to seek guidance and assistance from others.

Consider:

- When you pray the prayer of James 1:5, where do you expect the wisdom you seek to come from? How might God answer this prayer in ways you are not expecting?
- What types of significant decisions/crises might prompt you or your team to invite others into the room to assist in decision-making? Think of all the “bad” things that have happened to churches in recent years. Whom might you ask for guidance and assistance if the same were to happen to *your* church?
- Who in your own congregation might be equipped with wisdom in a particular area that you might want to invite into the decision-making processes of your leadership team (counselors, attorneys, human resource directors, CPAs, etc.)?
- Who *outside* your congregation might you consult on significant issues? Think about district and national EFCA leaders, about seminary professors, and about professions not represented within your church. Have you established relationships with these potential sources of wisdom and insight?
- How can we adopt a leadership culture of “slow down—take a deep breath—talk with others” when a crisis or significant issue arises?

Church leadership teams oftentimes face situations for which they are unprepared. What strategy do you and your team have to deal with these challenges? Who is on your contact list to help you figure things out? Who should be on that list? Is the answer in the room?

Rather than passively assume we will be endowed with miraculous wisdom, we may need to look for others to help us find answers. We may discover the truly amazing miracle: that God has already endowed His body, the Church, with the answers we need even before we knew that we would need them, just in time.

*This is adapted from a series of articles (“Something to Talk About”) intended to help facilitate conversations about significant issues that often are not discussed by pastors, boards and church leadership teams. Prior articles can be found at [efcawest.org](http://efcawest.org).*

*Bob Osborne is director of church health for EFCA West. “Helping EFCA churches is what district teams do,” he says. “EFCA churches and leaders are not alone.”*



# HOW CAN WE HELP PASTORS THRIVE?

## An excerpt from “Resilient Ministry”

BY BOB BURNS, TASHA D. CHAPMAN, DONALD C. GUTHRIE



Ministry leadership is a tough but highly rewarding job. Many pastors love the challenge, but most find it much more difficult than they had anticipated. Some wonder what they have gotten themselves into. Like a recent seminary graduate who shared with dismay, “I never expected the church to be like this.”

Or a pastor of 18 years who confided, “My experience in the ministry has been good. But I question whether I can subject my wife and family to this much longer.”

Statistics on the dropout rate of ministers vary.<sup>1</sup> But it is clear that conditions of ministry have changed in the past few decades and that too many local church ministers leave as a result.<sup>2</sup>

Lily Endowment, Inc., an Indiana-based foundation concerned about the health of the church, has been exploring this question of pastoral resilience for years. In one of its initiatives, called Sustaining Pastoral Excellence, the endowment invested over \$84 million to support 63 projects that explore what it takes to thrive in ministry. We coordinated one of these grants, running research and facilitating continuing education for pastors.

## WHAT IS PASTORAL EXCELLENCE?

One of our Lilly-funded programs was called the Pastors Summit.<sup>3</sup> At political summits, heads of state gather for several days to survey and collaborate on complex challenges. In a similar way, our summits were designed to be an emotionally safe place where pastors could share the difficulties of vocational ministry life.

“I may be a pastor, but I’m an inch deep. My life is filled with incessant activity and little prayer.”

As one summit pastor shared with his cohort:

*Most people in our church have a life that is like a stool with three legs. They’ve got their spiritual life, their professional life and their family life. If one of these legs wobbles, they’ve got two others they can lean on. For us, those three things can merge into one leg. You’re sitting on a one-legged stool, and it takes a lot more concentration and energy. It’s a lot more exhausting.*

After seven years of studying our summit participants—their personal lives, marriages, families and ministries—we learned a lot about what it takes to survive and thrive in ministry. Our discoveries focused around five primary themes for leadership resilience in fruitful ministry, each of which is dependent upon the others.

## THEME 1: SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When was the last time you heard someone ask pastors how they were doing in their walk with the Lord? Isn’t it self-evident that pastors are attending to their spiritual formation?

Sadly, the answer is no. One summit pastor bluntly shared:

*Look, I may be a pastor, but I'm an inch deep. My life is filled with incessant activity and little prayer. "Contemplation" is foreign in my vocabulary and nonexistent in my life.*

Another important aspect of spiritual formation is that spiritual maturity involves both the *personal* and *interpersonal*. Pastors, like all believers, need to be involved in personal aspects of Christian growth like worship, prayer and Bible study. At the same time, all Christians need one another. Jesus and the apostles never tired of stressing this need for community.<sup>4</sup>

As paid leaders in the congregation, however, pastors are rarely appreciated as persons with interests and relational needs. They are not looked at as fellow saints in the process of sanctification. As a result, pastors tend to be slow in opening up and sharing their lives with others. By so doing, they fail to grow spiritually.

Again, the themes all weave together: isolation is bad self-care *and* poor leadership as well.

## THEME 2: SELF-CARE

The idea of self-care involves the pursuit of physical, mental and emotional health. Self-care may initially sound selfish, yet in truth, responsible self-care is actually a way to deny oneself. Self-denying self-care may include getting to bed on time, saying no to work by setting aside periods of Sabbath and sabbatical, getting responsible exercise, and eating a balanced diet.

At one summit, we addressed areas of interest outside of work. One person responded:

*I don't know that there's much I could talk about other than what I do functionally as a pastor and what's going on in the life of the church. That's a scary revelation to make.*

We are not suggesting that all of the pastors in our study were one-dimensional workaholics. However, pastors can easily become so absorbed in their ministries that they fail to maintain a healthy equilibrium.

## THEME 3: EMOTIONAL AND CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

*Emotional intelligence.* Consider these statements from pastors in our summits:

*Well, you learn to play a game, to put on a mask, which then becomes a way you handle a lot of issues. You're suddenly the holy man that has to put on the holiness aura and have it all together. And that's going to come back and wipe you out. Wiped me out.*

*When I was in seminary, I was taught how to preach and how to exegete the Scriptures. I wasn't taught how to exegete people... I didn't know that pastoring is dealing with people and all their messiness.*

These statements illustrate common pastoral challenges in the two sides of emotional intelligence (EQ, named in like manner to IQ for intelligence quotient): EQ-self and EQ-others.

EQ-self is the ability to proactively manage one's own emotions. EQ-others concerns the ability to appropriately respond to the emotions of others.<sup>5</sup> Without this capacity, we tend to disregard others (whether we know it or not) while we push our own agendas.

*Cultural intelligence.* CQ involves an awareness of ethnic, geographical, socioeconomic, educational and generational differences and the implications of these differences on one's perspective and behavior.

## THEME 4: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

To sustain the stresses in ministry, pastors need to focus on spiritual and relational health with their spouse, children and extended family. But the challenges are significant. Who hasn't heard stories of spouses who felt they were in competition with the church? Or of children who share bitterly about being a "PK" (pastor's kid)?

Some pastors are so focused on others that they fail to be aware of how their spouses are doing. One pastor stated simply, "My family gets the scraps."

Since Jesus taught that the world will know we are His disciples by the love we demonstrate toward one another, then the first place this should be visible is in the home (John 13:35).

One of the most significant lessons we learned early in the Pastors Summit research was the strategic role that spouses have in sustaining their pastor-partners in the work of ministry.

## THEME 5: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

None of the first four themes describe the ministry tasks of leading worship, preaching, teaching and congregational oversight.<sup>6</sup> Of those four tasks, the last—which we renamed *leadership and management*—stood out as critical for survival in the long haul and is the least discussed in the pre-professional training of theological seminary.

Pastors are generally surprised by how much leadership and management is involved in their work. And they must learn it on the job.

In general, business and professional literature describes leadership as seeking adaptive and constructive change, while management provides order and consistency to organizations.<sup>7</sup> We describe leadership responsibilities as *poetry* and management tasks as *plumbing*.

As churches grow, leadership and management responsibilities are often separated into distinct roles. But as leaders of smaller businesses and churches know, they will always have both leadership and management obligations, even if they don't feel gifted for the work. As one summit pastor explained:

*What's my perfect job description? Preach, teach and spend time with my staff and elders. I'm so busy managing that I feel guilty doing relational things. I have this vision where I could maintain these close relationships and still keep the church moving forward if I had this guy—my own Ed McMahon—doing the stuff prohibiting me from doing what I want to do.*

Once pastors come to grips with the fact that the ministry requires them to lead and manage, they must learn to navigate the political realities of ministry—negotiating with others, choosing among conflicting wants and interests, developing trust, locating support and opposition, timing actions sensitively, and knowing the informal and formal organizational sources of influence and action.<sup>8</sup>

The responsibilities of pastoral life are continual. The pace and demands of ministry can be relentless, often pushing even the most dedicated pastors to question their calls and evaluate their lives.

It is time for all of us in the church to raise our understanding of ministry demands, review our expectations and make plans for building resilient pastoral excellence.

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<sup>1</sup> If you Google the phrase pastors leaving ministry, multiple websites declare that 1,500 pastors are leaving the ministry every month. From what we can identify, these “statistics” have been taken from magazines and articles, not studies developed from reliable research methods.

<sup>2</sup> Dean R Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: Why clergy leave local church ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), p. xi.

<sup>3</sup> Our book, *Resilient Ministry*, is based on seven years of research, which focused on gathering pastors and their spouses into peer cohorts that met repeatedly in multiday retreats called Pastors Summits. To choose pastors for the summit, we asked trusted colleagues about pastors who exhibited fruitfulness in ministry. Over a six-year period, we carefully selected and worked with 23 pastors in the Pastors Summit, representing 26 states. Gathering in small groups, each cohort met together three times a year, often with their spouses, during each two-year program. There we facilitated heartfelt discussions about the challenges of vocational ministry. This book presents the summary and analysis of those discussions along with actual words of real pastors, serving in real congregations and facing real-life issues. Although the cohort research was limited to the majority demographic of married male pastors and their wives, we believe the findings are relevant enough to help foster resilience for all those in vocational ministry.

<sup>4</sup> See the many references to “one another” in Scripture, such as John 13:34-35, Ephesians 5:21 and Hebrews 10:24-25.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the power of emotional intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), pg. 30.

<sup>6</sup> Jackson W. Carroll, *God's Potters: Pastoral leadership and the shaping of congregations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 98, 106.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Banks and Bernice Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership: A Christian evaluation of current approaches* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), pp. 17-19.

<sup>8</sup> John Forester, *Planning in the Face of Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

# MY THANKS TO YOU WHO ARE PASTORS

In recognition of both the routine and the readiness

BY GARTH WARREN

Yours is a sacred calling. People willingly entrust their lives to your shepherding, so yours is a praying life, a planning life and, sometimes, a broken life.



You reconciled long ago that the vast majority of your shepherding can't be quantified on a spreadsheet or in the bottom line of an annual report. Your work is largely unseen by most of your congregants.

I am writing to express thanks for all you've done to prepare for your vocation and for continuing to fight the good fight.

It was my great honor to serve as an executive pastor for nearly seven years, drawing upon my background in business and coaching. So I know the routine of weekly staff meetings, monthly planning sessions, seasonal calendaring events and the all-consuming energy necessary for a fall ramp-up. Each fit fairly neatly into my Outlook calendar.

And then, for a brief few months, I wore the dual hats of campus pastor and executive pastor. And in so doing, I gained an indelible glimpse into the complex realities of your life. I'd already seen your faithfulness to the routines of the church year. But now, what became abundantly clear was your ever-present readiness and leadership responsibility for that which you could never predict.

Two mornings in particular increased my admiration for you during that season as campus pastor.

One Monday late last fall, I received four calls before 10 a.m.:

- Garth, the child of one of my best friends died in an auto accident yesterday. Can you please help me think through what to say and how I can come alongside him?
- My wife has decided to leave me, please pray.
- I know I don't go to your church anymore, but we just found out that my brother-in-law took his life. Would you help us with the funeral?
- I am calling from Mayo in Scottsdale. Doctors say I am too sick for the procedure I came all the way out here for, and they are sending me home. What am I going to tell my kids?

On a different Monday morning, a man and his wife showed up for an 8 a.m. appointment. I was expecting a conversation about difficult personal issues. But it turned out that, after having heard his son's baptismal testimony the week before, the man wanted to be baptized, right then and there.

Both mornings required me to be “on,” to be ready and to be walking in step with the Holy Spirit. And both mornings represent what you face again and again: the deep, unexpected need for your pastoral care mixed with opportunities to share and affirm the hope of the gospel.

As noted earlier, the vast majority of your work goes unnoticed by the congregation, yet we are ever grateful for every unseen moment.

May you and your family be greatly blessed here on earth and most certainly into all of eternity.

*Garth Warren is chief development and communications officer of the EFCA and chairman of the board of Tyndale Theological Seminary in Amsterdam. He previously served as executive pastor of a large nondenominational church in Lake Forest, Illinois. He and his wife, Kristy, worship at Park EFC in St. Louis Park, Minnesota.*

# YOUR RELATIONAL ABILITIES MATTER MORE THAN YOUR PREACHING.

Even the best skill sets can't compensate.

BY JENNIFER M. KVAMME



What if there were one thing that frequently defeated pastors or crippled their ministries—no matter how skilled they were at preaching and teaching and no matter how upright they remained morally?

And what if, most of the time, these pastors remained oblivious to this subtle but deadly chink in their armor and therefore failed to protect themselves or their flock from its damaging effects?

Daryl Thompson, superintendent of the EFCA Northern Plains District, has seen this happen time after time. Gifted pastors, with no moral failings, have been asked to step down from ministries or have left their churches in discouragement because of one thing: low emotional intelligence (EQ).

EQ involves an awareness of one's emotions and the ability to manage them, as well as an awareness of the emotions of those around you and the ability to respond to them in helpful ways. A low EQ can lead to those around a leader feeling unheard, undervalued or “run over” in the process of trying to achieve a vision.

“Over time,” Daryl firmly believes, “EQ issues will eventually trump every other issue in ministry.” In his experience, a lack of emotional awareness and the people skills that go with it—rather than moral failure—have been the underlying factors in most cases where pastors were asked to leave or chose to leave in discouragement or conflict.

However, a low EQ doesn't have to cripple ministry and wound the church. There are practical and effective steps pastors can take to improve their emotional skills and protect their ministries.

## WHAT ARE YOUR VULNERABILITIES?

The importance of EQ has been gaining attention in both business and ministry realms in recent decades. A study of 80 science Ph.D.s that began in the 1950s revealed, 40 years later, that social and emotional abilities were four times more important than IQ in determining professional success.

Peter Scazzero, pastor and prolific author on the topic, declares low EQ to be a significant problem for church leaders. In “4 Ways to Be an Emotionally Healthy Leader,” he refers to research predicting that two-thirds of people currently in leadership will fail, and the most common reason will be their inability to build or maintain a team.

Scazzero believes that this failure is due to dysfunctional tendencies (of which these leaders are unaware) that



cause them to make poor decisions and alienate people. “Every leader has significant vulnerabilities and ‘derailers,’” Scazzerro notes. “Emotionally healthy leaders are acutely aware of them and manage them well.”

Matt Brent is a worship pastor at GracePoint Church (EFCA) in Bismarck, North Dakota, who has learned this from experience. In his former church, he became lead pastor after four years as worship pastor. A new pastor and a fresh, new voice helped build momentum, and the church grew from 280 to 400 in less than two years.

But new leadership also brought changes in the vision and direction. And as they executed the vision, Matt began noticing a disturbing trend: a steady stream of people *leaving* the church, including key leaders and close friends. Each person leaving seemed to voice only a small issue with children’s ministry or worship preferences—there was no real pattern.

For six frustrating years, Matt witnessed this downward spiral, finding himself unable to stop it and eventually burning out from trying. He finally resigned and moved to Bismarck to work alongside a senior pastor with more than four decades of experience. By watching this pastor handle some similar situations, Matt says, “I started getting an inkling of some of the mistakes I’d made.”

Matt still believes that the vision changes were the right ones, yet he began to identify how he and the other leaders had made some mistakes in how they “moved the changes forward into body life.”

Then at a district conference, he attended Daryl Thompson’s workshop on EQ. And the lights began to go on. *Wow, he’s talking about me a lot*, Matt thought.

As Matt processed the information and looked back on his former pastorate, his new understanding of emotional intelligence gave him a framework for understanding what had happened.

“I started to remember all the conversations I’d had with people where I basically ran over them,” he admits. “I impugned their faith, their motives, everything—not validating and listening to what they were trying to tell me.”

Much of it, he realizes now, boiled down to his own inability to deal with dissent. He took questions and concerns as personal attacks because of how much he’d invested into the decisions, and so he wasn’t able to hear the heart behind the concerns.

Matt had already planned to visit his former hometown shortly after the district conference. Now, though, he took the opportunity to call up a few people on his former church board and meet with them to apologize and share what he’d learned. “There was release on my part, release on theirs and real reconciliation,” he says.

## IT DOESN’T MATTER HOW “ANOINTED” YOU ARE ...

While the tendencies Matt displayed are indisputably common, leading to division and broken relationships, one thing sets Matt’s story apart: He recognized the problem.

If someone *wants* to improve, Daryl points out, he or she likely has fairly healthy emotional intelligence—enough to work on those relational issues. (True examples of low EQ are actually difficult to remedy, simply because those who most need help are least likely to recognize their need or allow others to speak into their lives.)

Working on relational skills is uniformly crucial for those in ministry. “It’s simply not possible to become spiritually mature while you remain emotionally immature,” writes Scazzerro in “The Spiritual Importance of Becoming an Emotionally Healthy Preacher,” published at [preachingtoday.com](http://preachingtoday.com).

“If you’re critical, defensive, touchy, unapproachable, insecure—telltale signs of emotional immaturity—you can’t be spiritually mature. It doesn’t matter how ‘anointed’ you are or how much Bible knowledge you have. Love is that

indispensable mark of maturity.”

The bottom line: Because all ministry has relational roots, even the best skill sets cannot sustain a pastor’s ministry if he doesn’t learn to navigate the messiness of relationships. Unfortunately, as Daryl points out, this is not usually at the top of what churches look for in a pastor. They are often impressed with a candidate’s preaching and teaching skills, which can lead them to overlook relational or emotional problems that may seem minor, if they surface at all.

“But eventually,” Daryl warns, “if that relational base is not healthy enough, ministry will break down. You simply cannot compensate for relationally engaging with people by being a good teacher.”

When the ministry breaks down, it leaves not only a discouraged pastor but also a hurting church in his wake.

## BUILD IN SAFEGUARDS

Everyone experiences strained relationships, imperfectly manages emotions and feels defensive in response to criticism. But leaders can take practical steps to safeguard themselves and their churches from the effects of these relational weaknesses.

*Become aware.* Awareness is an important first step and was life-changing for Matt Brent. Fortunately, many resources address the topic of emotional intelligence.<sup>1</sup> Emotionally Healthy Spirituality offers a free, brief assessment of your emotional maturity as a starting point.

*Invite others in.* Terri Miller, resource team leader for SERVEurope (part of EFCA ReachGlobal), has witnessed the aftermath of poor communication and relational skills in ministries. For some, she believes, emotional intelligence comes naturally. “For the rest of us,” she adds, “we can grow in our abilities. We can also benefit greatly from partnering with people who are more intuitive in terms of this kind of intelligence.”

This might mean including people who are good at “reading others” into important meetings, to help gauge emotional levels and buy-in; but it also means inviting close friends and coworkers to point out areas of weakness.

*Learn active listening skills.* Matt encourages pastors to learn how to listen better, to understand nonverbal communication and to hear without making assumptions about motives. Anyone who can do that is much more likely to sustain healthy relationships even in the midst of disagreement.

*Seek professional help.* Because so many emotional and relational tensions spring from insecurity and unhealed emotional wounds, pastors and Christian leaders would do well to seek out a counselor or recovery group if unresolved issues may be contributing to insecurity or emotional needs. When a pastor’s sense of identity is found solidly in Christ, he will not need others’ approval for his sense of worth.

A lack of emotional awareness and relational maturity may be taking down far too many ministries, but if pastors work to combat their weaknesses and grow their relational skills, they will not only safeguard their ministries but also allow God to mature their faith so that they reap the fruit of richer, healthier, more resilient relationships.

## HOW STRONG IS YOUR EQ? CONSIDER THESE RED FLAGS.

People often inform you that they were offended or hurt by your words or actions.

- You have a hard time receiving feedback and tend to be defensive.
- People who come for counseling don’t return.
- You would describe more relationships as stressful or draining than healthy and happy; and ...

- You're unable to identify and resolve the issues that have caused those strained relationships.
- You have a hard time keeping support staff and associate pastors for long or getting them on board with your vision or ideas.
- You tend to blame others and portray yourself as a victim.

If these red flags are hitting home, consider asking another trusted leader for ways you might improve your emotional awareness and communication skills.

If, however, these red flags seem to be pointing to a colleague, ask God to do the hard work of preparing that person to hear feedback—whether from you or another source.

*Jennifer M. Kvamme is student ministries coordinator at Centennial EFC (Forest Lake, MN), where she has served for 13 years. She is also a writer, wife, and mom of two beautiful and energetic preschool girls, and is daily learning how to live out healthy relationships in all of those contexts.*

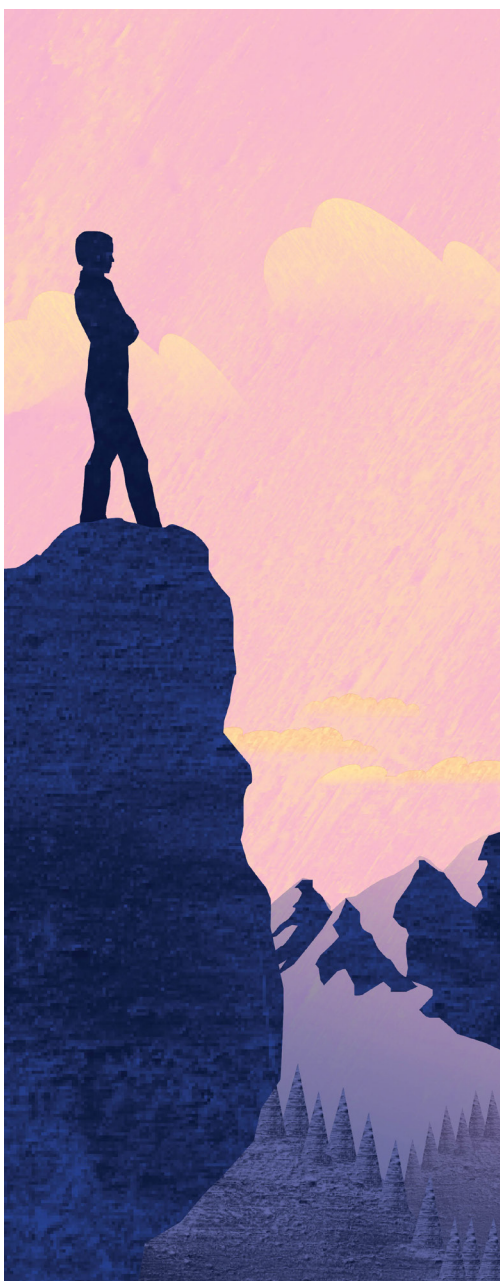
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<sup>1</sup> Emotional Intelligence 2.0, by Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves; *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality and The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, by Peter Scazzero; *Changes That Heal*, by Henry Cloud; *Generation to Generation*, by Edwin H. Friedman; *Living Life at Its Best: Where faith and emotional intelligence intersect*, by Allan G. Hedberg.

# NEED BETTER TOOLS TO IMPLEMENT YOUR VISION?

## Leadership and management skills for the pulpit

BY DIANE J. MCDOUGALL



John was only one year into the pastorate at his new church when he and his elder board did what pastors and elder boards routinely do: attend a ministry conference. Their intent was to nose around for effective community-outreach ideas.

But before long, conversations at that conference helped expand their thinking. “We needed far more than fresh outreach ideas,” John Edgecomb says now, from his office at Harper EFC in Southworth, Washington. “We needed a clear direction and strategy that we could align all our church ministries around.”

John wasn’t new to pastoring; he’d served another church for 17 years. But he lacked training in organizational management. “I’ve got strong skills in counseling and in teaching, and I’m a motivational-type guy,” he clarifies. “But you’ve got to know how to develop people, then organize and launch teams and manage them.

“A pastor who doesn’t do that will be like Dick van Dyke in *Mary Poppins*—where he’s the one-man band, playing every instrument himself.”

Like John, many pastors today scramble for answers when it comes to the complexities of leadership. They’ve read pertinent books and their seminary professors have warned them, yes. But not until they find themselves wearing the leadership mantle does the weight of it fully hit home.

Close behind the clarion call for visionary leadership comes the drumbeat for basic management skills. “As leaders of smaller businesses and churches know, they will always have both leadership and management obligations, even if they don’t feel gifted for the work,” note the authors of *Resilient Ministry*.

Indeed, in an informal survey of pastors about what they wish they'd known before stepping into the pastorate, church-growth expert Thom Rainer identified "basic leadership skills" and "business training" as the No. 1 and No. 5 responses.

Clearly, the skills required to passionately and responsibly lead a church toward fulfillment of its God-given vision are not conferred with a seminary diploma. Yet they are crucial. Fortunately, even a pastor whose calling is clear but whose spiritual gifts lie elsewhere can find the support needed.

## VISIONARY LEADERSHIP REQUIRED? SEEK OUTSIDE EXPERTISE

For *his* extra leadership support, John Edgecomb turned to a coaching network he'd heard about while at the ministry conference. Via Ministry Advantage, John was paired with a pastor-mentor in California who had experience taking a church the size of Harper (attendance roughly 400 then) to the next level. The strategic leadership coaching via phone calls and several in-person meetings was transformational, John says—"a huge new set of tools in my toolbox."

He learned how to tighten up the church's vision, mission and values; then frame a strategy in light of those elements and get everybody on board. John also learned how to develop and manage ministry teams.

"If you don't have the management structure to grow your church," he says, "it's easy to get the cart before the horse: You have great ideas of programs to launch, but you don't have an organizational framework that holds it all together and gives you direction. With the help of a super gifted administrative pastor, we were able build that framework."

John's experience is not unique. "Pastors usually have a passion for teaching the Bible and for shepherding, but they don't have strengths in leading teams, developing people and ministries, expanding the organization," reports Russ Olmon, founder of Ministry Advantage, with 20 years experience in leadership coaching.

With an experienced mentor, however, a pastor isn't left alone to walk through critical decisions and conversations. A pastor whom Russ and his team had coached once told him: "What you guys have been for me is a crash dummy: Instead of crashing into my board or church, I can crash into my coach first, and he'll tell me if there's a better way to say or do it."

Without such help, according to Russ, "a lot of pastors suffer in silence. They go to conferences, which are great for motivation and inspiration. Then they return to their churches and sit behind their desk with a new great idea and still don't know how to do it.

"Eventually the pain for too many pastors becomes too high. Eighty percent of pastors who come to us feel they're not able to meet the demands of their job. They are so discouraged, they're having thoughts of leaving the ministry."

But, of course, no program or training is a guarantee of church growth. Brian Rathbun is another EFCA pastor who has benefited from Ministry Advantage's coaching. And he's quick to say that coaching "is not a magic pill."

Brian invested 20 years as church planter/pastor of CrossBridge EFC (now renamed The Well) in Rochester, New York, before handing off the church to the next pastor in 2012. "If the church's or the pastor's struggle involves organizational structure or implementation of vision, leadership coaching will help," he clarifies. "But if the issue is sin or immaturity or dysfunction, it's not going to help with that."

According to Brian, what leadership coaching does best is help a church (whatever its size) run well; then everyone can watch God do what He wants, to grow the church.

## STRONGER MANAGEMENT SKILLS NEEDED? LOOK RIGHT UNDER YOUR NOSE

Skills in leadership and management are actually two sides of the same coin. As Russ Olmon puts it: “Leadership is knowing what to do. Management is knowing how to do it. Without both skills, a pastor will either be a great manager but the church will have no direction, or he’ll have great ideas but be unable to accomplish them.”

Another pastor, Rustin Smith, admits that he suffered from the latter: great vision but an inability to bring his vision to reality.

When Rustin stepped in as pastor of Vox Dei Community Church (EFCA) in Belton, Missouri, the church was basically starting over. Without many resources and only a small core team, he knew he couldn’t “do it all.” So he entrusted leadership to individuals along the way while looking for that strong right-hand person to help make his dreams a reality.

Three years into it, Rustin realized that lay leader Peggy Heid had the spiritual maturity, integrity and business savvy he needed. Since 2011, she has volunteered her time at Vox Dei in two roles: ministry development director and business administrator. And it doesn’t hurt that Peggy is a consultant with Living Stones Associates, helping churches in the areas of church health and strategic planning.

She’s found that offering financial advice or resources is one thing; when it comes to offering ministry development and leadership advice, she says, “that has to be more nuanced.” Yet with a pastor like Rustin, who’s secure in his gifting and able to recognize what the church needs, Peggy has flourished—which has led to Rustin *and* the church flourishing as well.

Peggy remembers: “Rustin’s wife once told me, ‘He has all these great ideas in his head, a beautiful picture of how he wants the church to work, but it’s hard for him to bring it to action. You seem like a person who can make things happen, and I think that’s a pairing made in heaven.’”

Indeed, with Peggy at his side, serving much like an executive pastor, Rustin has been able to lead the church in initiating a connections ministry and created a leadership community; in launching a spiritual formation plan and completing a building campaign; and more.

For Rustin, the key to making this relationship work is that he can rely on not only Peggy’s skills but also her character. “She’s a very capable, spiritually mature, high-level leader herself. The trust is what has made it not only work well but also made it a real joy.

“I have a sense of what I’m called to as a pastor, and what I want to spend my time doing and not spend my time doing. I wish I had a dozen people who could work together as Peggy and I do.”

## DO WHATEVER IT TAKES

When pastors realize they need additional training, coaching or help in areas of management and leadership, they have several options: contact groups like Ministry Advantage or the Malphurs Group for individualized coaching; look within their own congregations for an experienced lay person; or return to school for a master’s degree in an area such as leadership/organizational development.

But it’s crucial that they *do* seek help. After all, warns pastor/author Chris Hefner, “Someone is leading your congregation. If it’s not the senior pastor, then you need to find out who is leading.”

And the senior pastor can’t afford to make off-the-cuff management decisions by blindly “stepping out in faith”—

unaware of the resources needed to carry out his vision. He must balance the essential “triple bottom line” of ministry:<sup>1</sup> gospel impact (Great Commission), social good (Great Commandment) and financial feasibility.

In short, leadership oversight and management skills matter. They might not be a pastor’s primary gift. And there’s rarely time to learn them in a classroom. Yet, out in the nitty-gritty of daily life in the local church, God surfaces the need and then provides the resources needed.

*To understand how strong leaders in secondary positions in the church can help senior pastors reach their potential, Peggy Heid recommends reading Leading From the Second Chair: Serving your church, fulfilling your role, and realizing your dreams, by Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson.*

*Other recommended reading: Spiritual Leadership, by J. Oswald Sanders; Christian Leadership Essentials by Trinity University President David S. Dockery; “How Pastors Rate as Leaders,” by Eric Reed and Collin Hansen, published at ChristianityToday.com; A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the age of the quick fix, by Edwin H. Friedman; Leading With a Limp, by Dan B. Allender; Intuitive Leadership, by Tim Keel.*

<sup>1</sup> This phrase was coined by Daryl Anderson, executive director of operations for EFCA ReachGlobal.



# THE KINDNESS OF REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

## Offering grace and a helping hand to your pastor

BY LEE ECLOV



Pastoral ministry does not lend itself to reasonable expectations. God Himself pushes His shepherds pretty hard. Ask Moses about reasonable expectations, or Jeremiah. Read the Pastoral Epistles again.

As if the expectations of Scripture aren't daunting enough, today's church culture often adds intense pressure on pastors to see their churches grow, to enlist more people in programs, to raise more funds and to have better "worship." And pastors put expectations on themselves to invest more hours, run a tighter ship and offer a ready acquiescence to anyone who wants a piece of their time.

If pastors are to "shepherd the flock of God that is under your care," they need help from leaders to manage expectations.

### HELP YOUR PASTOR ORIENT TO GOD'S GRACE.

A lot of fine pastors are like the prodigal's elder brother, only without the judgmental hypocrisy (Luke 15). They've given years of hard, consistent, obedient work with never a celebration. These pastors do not really know how to enjoy their Father's favor. They need friends to invite them to God's grace.

This isn't a call to a pastor-appreciation event (not that he'd mind). These driven pastors need friends who help them see God's delight in them and recognize that the Father is proud of their accomplishments. They need help to understand what our Good Shepherd means when He says, "I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30).

They are Marthas who need a friend to help them sit quietly with Mary at Jesus' feet (Luke 10:38-42).

This calls for a ministry of patient listening, of spiritual observation and of gentle biblical reorientation. Go very easy on advice.

### HELP YOUR PASTOR REKINDLE HIS CALLING.

Apparently, Timothy was losing his pastoral nerve when Paul told him to fan into flame his calling (2 Timothy 1:6). Pastors are called to shepherd the flock of God—to feed, lead and guard God's people. Also central to any pastoral call, I believe, is a love for communicating God's Word.

Yet the daily ministry ABCs—attendance, buildings and cash—have a way of sapping pastoral energy. They are soul-less metrics. They relentlessly emphasize efficiency and economy when pastoral work must have space for God’s inefficient imperatives: prayer, contemplation and unrushed times with individuals.

Help your pastor create space to meet and pray with people, to invest in “contemplative exegesis” (to use Eugene Peterson’s phrase) and to do “inefficient” ministry.

## HELP CARRY THE BURDENS OF YOUR PASTOR’S HEART.

I’m biased, but I don’t think lay leaders can grasp the unique weight of all that pastors carry. Pastor Paul wrote of the burdens of shepherding: “Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?” (2 Corinthians 11:29).

The sorrows, secrets and sins of our people lay heavy upon us. Church tensions keep us awake at night. Our hearts ache when someone leaves the church.

We also live with the pressure of always being the good example. I think most pastors feel their spiritual inadequacies very sharply. We ought to pray more, be more attentive, be better preachers or counselors or strategic leaders.

Pastors have much in common with Moses in the story in Exodus 11: The Israelites prevailed in battle only as long as Moses held his hands out high above the battlefield. When his arms dropped, the battle turned, so Aaron and Hur held his arms up till the victory was secured.

Like many other pastors, I have known the descendants of Aaron and Hur. I have felt the grace of their hands lifting mine.

In the frightening early days of the church I’ve served now for more than 18 years, I was deeply disheartened to see some people leave who had warmly welcomed us only three months before. I hadn’t even had time to mess up!

One day Dill happened by my office. She is as stalwart a soul as I know, and like a mother to me. I told her of my discouragement. “Lee,” she said, “if everyone else leaves, I will follow you out the door and turn off the lights.”

What a gracious gift of God to have someone hold up your weary hands till the battle turns.

There are times when pastors have to go it alone, but thank God for the times He sends us the heirs of Aaron and Hur—to reorient us to His grace, help rekindle our calling and shoulder part of our burdens.

*Lee Eclov is senior pastor of the Village Church of Lincolnshire (EFCA), in Lake Forest, Illinois, and an adjunct professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. In addition to writing for several pastoral publications, he is the author of the Pastor’s Service Manual and Pastoral Graces: Reflections on the care of souls. Check out his website, [LeeEclov.com](http://www.leeeclov.com), to learn more about “Pastors’ Gatherings: How We Shepherd” (<http://www.leeeclov.com/pastors-gatherings/>).*

# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

## How God Built Upon My Seminary Foundation

BY KEVIN KOMPELIEN



I consider my time at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School to be one of the great blessings of my life. The opportunity to study under Walter Kaiser, D.A. Carson, Gleason Archer, Harold O.J. Brown, John Woodbridge and many other godly and gifted professors gave me a love for learning, foundational skills and a toolbox of resources that I have used in ministry for more than 30 years.

In addition, I was significantly impacted by the deep love for the Lord, His Word and His church that I saw in their lives. These are some of the top scholars in the world, and they cared about preparing me to serve Jesus and His church well.

As challenging as those days were academically, they were also formative in my life beyond the classroom. Initially I wasn't excited about the requirement to do a meaningful "field education" experience in a local church while at the same time handling a full load of classes and working at a part-time job.

Yet, it was the time invested in the lives of junior-high students at North Suburban EFC that grounded my academic studies in the ups and downs of ministry in and through the local church. The opportunity to disciple a small group of junior-high boys kept my heart soft to God's call to ministry during the rigors of a high-level academic experience.

I was also privileged to do a full-time, year-long internship at my home church as part of my seminary experience. During those months I preached my first sermon series, conducted my first funeral, planned worship services, attended elder meetings, visited the sick and learned the "people side" of ministry in a local church setting. Curtis Anderson, my supervising pastor, demonstrated a humble servant's heart and a deep love for learning—what a model for my own service as a pastor and a leader.

The strong foundation that I received at TEDS has served me well. Yet I can also see how God built on that foundation as I walked alongside people in the day-to-day experiences of life and ministry.

I learned how to pray, for example, not from a book or a course but from a small group of men in the first church I served. We met every week for five years during our lunch hour—kneeling in the basement of my friend Al's home, crying out to God for our church and our city.

I learned a great deal about leading and managing staff from a couple of church leaders during a challenging time with a difficult staff member. They loved the church, cared about me and had keen insights into some skills I didn't possess. Rather than making me feel inadequate, they opened the door for me to learn from them.

I am a better leader today because the Lord has brought people into my life who stretch and strengthen me as we walk in ministry together. It's exactly what a colleague has said to me: "At some juncture, none of us is ever completely prepared. God makes it that way so we can see the beauty of the body of Christ exercise its gifts precisely when called upon."

My seminary training gave me the biblical, theological, hermeneutical and homiletical skills that I have drawn upon

for my years of ministry. I learned to think deeply and biblically about issues, giving me a framework and a passion for being a lifelong learner.

At the same time, I am extremely thankful that through the years the Lord has consistently brought people into my life whom He has used to grow, shape and develop me even further.

When I hear pastors say, “They didn’t teach me that in seminary,” I often smile and reflect on the fact that much of what we need for effective ministry just can’t be learned in an academic classroom. In reality, life and ministry are our classroom, and the Lord will continue to teach us and shape us if we are open to see what He is doing and whom He is bringing into our lives to walk the journey together.