

EXCERPT



The Flourishing Pastor
Recovering the Lost Art of Shepherd Leadership

December 14, 2021 | \$18, 248 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0132-5

With the risk of burnout at an all-time high, pastors need a new framework for ministry that will help them move from survival to flourishing. Drawing on the image of the shepherd leader, Tom Nelson offers pastors wisdom and timely vision for leadership that integrates in-depth biblical teaching and whole-life discipleship, providing a road map for ministry resilience and longevity.

Faithful and Fruitful Pastoral Longevity

The pastoral vocational calling is a wonderful privilege, but it is also fraught with many perils. In addition to our own weaknesses and sinful proclivities, we face spiritual opposition, difficult dynamics in our family systems, and very demanding leadership roles. Pastors share the joys and heartaches of many, stewarding the care and spiritual formation of congregants. In addition, we foster the ongoing health of the local church as an enduring institution. In aggregate, the weighty and complex stewardships pastors carry often feel exhausting and overwhelming. The pastoral calling is a very challenging vocation.

So how are pastors doing today? When we survey the landscape of contemporary pastoral leadership, we find many pastors are not flourishing. What we uncover behind professional Sunday smiles is pastoral isolation and burnout; struggles with relational, emotional, physical, and spiritual health; increasing expectations of congregations; conflicts with governing boards as well as the increased complexity of the pastoral vocation. Added to these challenges, pastors face strong cultural headwinds in an increasingly secular context. In this cultural milieu, pastors are often marginalized, at best seen as a kind of quaint cultural anachronism and at worst oppressors of human freedom. I believe the pastoral vocation is increasingly at risk, and the ramifications for the vitality of the local church community and its mission in the world are hanging on a more precarious leadership thread. Pastoral leadership matters more than we may realize. When pastors flourish, congregations flourish, and when congregations flourish, communities flourish.

For the last two decades I have had the privilege of working with many younger pastors fresh out of seminary who join our local church two-year immersive residency program. At a favorite coffee shop, I have had many heartfelt conversations as young pastors wrestle with whether they should be pastors, whether they can truly flourish over a lifetime in the pastoral vocation. Many young pastors have seen way too many discouraging examples of pastors who have melted down personally and professionally and way too few examples of pastors who continue to flourish over the long haul of pastoral leadership. While I admit there are many perils in the pastoral vocation, into this growing cynicism I want to scream from the rooftops the hopeful truth that the One who calls pastors will provide the wisdom, guidance, strength, and empowerment to flourish and finish well.

Even though I have served in a pastoral vocation for over three decades, I continue to stay passionately curious, joyfully grateful, and hopefully expectant. Clearly I have not arrived, nor do I claim superior wisdom, but transparently, my understanding of the pastoral calling is vastly different now than it was when I first picked up the mantle of pastoral leadership. As I have sought greater faithfulness, fruitfulness, and flourishing, I have been on a steep learning, unlearning,



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Tom Nelson (DMin, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is president of Made to Flourish. He has also served as senior pastor of Christ Community Church in Kansas City for over thirty years. A council member for The Gospel Coalition, Tom is the author of several books, including *Work Matters* and *The Economics of Neighborly Love*.

and relearning curve. This has caused me to see the primacy of shepherding as the paradigm for my vocation.

Psalm 78:72 has illumined my understanding, formation, and practice of the pastoral vocation. The Psalmist speaks of Israel's King David, "So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart and guided them with his skillful hands." In this inspired text of Holy Scripture, those called to the pastoral vocation are given wisdom that is both timely and timeless, concerned with both the inner person and the outer work.

Recapturing Scripture's calling for pastoral shepherding has meant embracing a more robust biblical theology—a greater canonical coherence that reframes exegesis and language to adhere to the entire biblical witness of Holy Scripture—with the gospel centrally speaking into every nook and cranny of human existence. I've grown in breadth of pastoral formational skills, moving into classic spiritual disciplines, interpersonal neurobiology, and attachment theory. My pastoral practices—from liturgy to discipleship to pastoral care—have adopted a more integral approach, equipping congregants for their Monday vocational worlds. Pastoring the whole life of a disciple now includes the integration of faith, work, and economic wisdom; that is, a primary work of the church is the church at work.

If you are considering the pastoral vocation, my prayer is that this book will offer insight and hope that pastoral leadership is a calling where joyful flourishing is truly possible. If you are presently serving in a pastoral vocation, I pray this labor of love from an imperfect pastoral colleague will give you some helpful insight and be a booster shot of encouragement to live well and pastor well. If you are not in pastoral leadership but desire to encourage your pastoral staff, I trust this book will prove a gift of loving encouragement to your pastor and assist you in better understanding, supporting, and praying for those who serve you and your local church.

—Adapted from the introduction

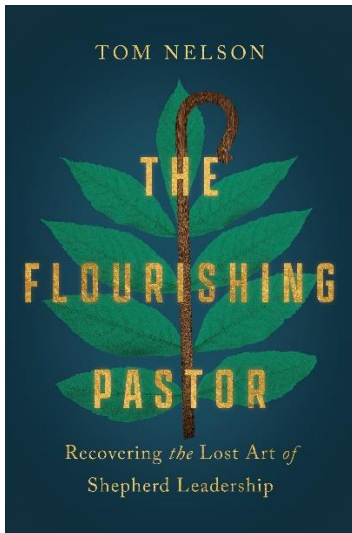


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ENDORSEMENTS



The Flourishing Pastor *Recovering the Lost Art of Shepherd Leadership*

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"*The Flourishing Pastor* is for the pastor seeking the guideposts, realities, and markers of a long and faithful ministry. Theologically rich and practically informed, *The Flourishing Pastor* will challenge the reader to adopt a deeper understanding of sabbath rest, physical health, and emotional health. I highly recommend this book." —**Jimmy Dodd**, founder and CEO of PastorServe, author of *Survive or Thrive: 6 Relationships Every Pastor Needs*

A "Mission Critical" Guidebook

"Traditionally there are three parts to the ordained ministry—preaching, pastoring, and leading. In our religious world today, preaching and leading are the most highly valued. But while it is not so visible and attention grabbing, skillful knowledge of and pastoring of the human soul is perhaps the most fundamental of the three. Talented preachers and leaders who are not mature and wise pastors may draw a crowd, but they will not help believers 'grow in grace' (2 Peter 3:18) and Christlikeness in both their private and public lives. Tom Nelson's fine book will help rehabilitate the importance of the work of shepherding in our churches."

—**Tim Keller**, Redeemer City to City

"Years ago I heard someone say that the best thing a pastor can give to his congregation is his own holiness. Based on that counsel, my go-to prayer for myself and other pastors is, 'Lord, always grant us character that is greater than our giftings and humility that is greater than our influence.' My friend Tom Nelson has written a wonderful field guide for every pastor who shares in this sentiment. If you are a pastor who values not only building a flourishing congregation but also your own flourishing soul, I cannot recommend this book highly enough."

—**Scott Sauls**, senior pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee, and author of *Jesus Outside the Lines*

"Tom Nelson is the pastor I want to teach me how to flourish in ministry. He reminds us that nothing but intimacy with Jesus can help us recover the lost art of shepherd leadership. I'm grateful that Tom walks what he talks and sets an example for us as we follow Christ."

—**Collin Hansen**, vice president of content and editor in chief of The Gospel Coalition, coauthor of *Rediscover Church: Why the Body of Christ Is Essential*

"I remember the first time I heard Tom speak, the words of a prophet in a winsome spirit, and now this book. The gospel is deeply imbedded in each page, a clarion call to pastors everywhere, asking what is at the heart of their call and exploring the painful reality of what happens to the kingdom when it is not embraced. Coming out of Covid, this may be the most important book for you to get your hands on. If we don't rethink the church now, when will we?"

—**Nancy Ortberg**, CEO of Transforming the Bay with Christ

"If you're a pastor, you need to read this book—your destiny is hanging in the balance. Tom Nelson shows how the hazards of your occupation are liable to squeeze the life right out of your soul unless you yourself learn to abide in the intimate watchcare of the Great Shepherd. In short, pastoral self-care is mission critical."

—**Bill Hendricks**, executive director for Christian leadership, the Hendricks Center at Dallas Theological Seminary, and president of the Giftedness Center



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