



# SHEPHERDING GOD'S PEOPLE

Foreword by John Ortberg

A Guide to Faithful and Fruitful  
Pastoral Ministry

Siang-Yang Tan

“I have had the honor of speaking in Siang-Yang Tan’s church—or rather, Christ’s church where Dr. Tan serves as pastor—and I can witness that it is a place of joyful worship, loving fellowship, and abundant food. This warm congregation thrives in large measure due to the many years of pastoral care of Pastor Siang-Yang Tan. In *Shepherding God’s People*, Dr. Tan shares with us the wisdom of his years of academic and pastoral insight. This book is packed with exhaustive research and lived experience. I recommend it highly.”

—Richard J. Foster, author of *Celebration of Discipline and Streams of Living Water*

“Siang-Yang Tan is an astute, experienced, and wise guide for those called to shepherd Christ’s church. In *Shepherding God’s People*, readers will discover a wealth of knowledge and counsel for carrying out their pastoral vocations powerfully, sanely, and safely. Highly recommended.”

—Chris Hall, president, *Renovaré*

“Dr. Tan loves the Lord and has a heart for ministry that jumps off every page in *Shepherding God’s People*. I have been honored to watch my friend and colleague have a deep and lasting impact as he trains leaders around the world to point others toward Christ. A must-have for everyone who has influence in the life of another—that means *you*.”

—Tim Clinton, president, American Association of Christian Counselors; executive director, James Dobson Family Institute

“Rarely does a person in ministry discover a book that combines comprehensive scholarly research, deep spiritual wisdom, and practical resources for the nitty-gritty work of nurturing a community of faith. Dr. Tan has written such a book. *Shepherding God’s People* will serve as an invaluable primer for men and women entering ministry and as a source of deep enrichment and encouragement for veteran pastors.”

—Laura R. Harbert, former Dean of Chapel and Spiritual Formation, Fuller Theological Seminary; adjunct affiliate professor, Fuller Graduate School of Psychology

“In an exceptionally well-researched book, supported by years of experience as pastor, psychologist, and friend, it is hard to imagine an area of interest to pastors that has not been insightfully covered in Dr. Tan’s book. *Shepherding God’s People* deserves wide and careful reading.”

—Larry Crabb, founder and director of NewWay Ministries

“I’m keeping this book close at hand because of its holistic, God-drenched, imminently practical view of pastoring. Incredibly, Siang-Yang Tan actually lives this out as pastor in his own church.”

—Jan Johnson, author of *Meeting God in Scripture*; board chair of Dallas Willard Ministries

“Siang-Yang Tan is a pastor’s pastor. And this book is full of wisdom accrued the honest way—through more than two decades of pastoral experience. In a culture that idolizes cults of personality, and where many pastoral leadership models all too closely resemble the corporate world, *Shepherding God’s People* is a welcome and needed reminder that humility, godliness, love, and a life of prayer are the keys to a fruitful and God-honoring ministry. This book is both practical and learned, as one would expect from a pastor theologian like Tan. Whether you are just starting out as a pastor or have been in pastoral ministry for many years, there is much wisdom to be gleaned here.”

—Rev. Gerald Hiestand, senior pastor, Calvary Memorial Church;  
director, Center for Pastor Theologians

“Full disclosure: I am completely biased. Siang-Yang Tan is one of my best friends. He is also my pastor—even though I’ve heard him preach only once. He is my pastor because for over three decades he has sought me out and prayed with me and for me as we have navigated both the highs and lows of life. If tomorrow brings unexpected joy or tragedy, Siang-Yang Tan is the person I would want to tell. It is not surprising that he has written this comprehensive, transparent, practical, formational, and Spirit-filled book for the present and next generation of soul shepherds.”

—Gary W. Moon, founding executive director of the Martin Institute and Dallas Willard Center, Westmont College; author of *Apprenticeship with Jesus* and *Becoming Dallas Willard: The Formation of a Philosopher, Teacher, and Christ-Follower*

“Siang-Yang Tan’s *Shepherding God’s People* provides a comprehensive overview of pastoral ministry. Tan draws wisdom from contemporary thinking as well as from his own personal ministry experiences. This book is as valuable for its summaries of key ideas in the relevant literature related to its many topics as it is for Tan’s own constructive advice growing out of his congregational ministry. *Shepherding God’s People* offers a biblically based, Christ-centered, evangelically faithful, and personally practical survey of the multifaceted aspects of a pastor’s life and work. Both seminary and undergraduate students, as well as those practicing pastoral ministry, will find Tan’s book helpful in clarifying their role and calling.”

—R. Robert Creech, professor of pastoral leadership  
and director of pastoral ministries, George W. Truett  
Theological Seminary, Baylor University

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**Siang-Yang Tan**

Foreword by John Ortberg

  
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To the memory of my late mother,  
Madam Chiow Yang Quek (1927–2017),

who went home to be with the Lord on January 28, 2017, Chinese New Year's Day, now experiencing perfect peace and eternal joy in the love of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Her life was an exemplary model of servanthood, humility, caring, and sacrificial love, which are what pastoral ministry and the church are all about, following Jesus Christ as “the Chief Shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:4) and “the good shepherd” who “lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

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PART 1

**BIBLICAL AND  
THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS  
OF PASTORAL MINISTRY**

# 1

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## A Biblical Perspective on Pastoral and Church Ministry

Serving as a pastor (or church leader) in a local church is a special and wonderful calling from God to shepherd his people or flock. It is a sacred privilege that has both joys and sorrows, peaks and valleys, triumphs and trials, and blessings and burdens, as does life itself. Some have described the pastoral calling as the highest and noblest calling, while others have called it impossible and most stressful. Albert Mohler wrote:

The Christian pastor holds the greatest office of human responsibility in all creation. He is called to preach the Word, to teach the truth to God's people, to lead God's people in worship, to tend the flock as a caring shepherd, and to mobilize the church for Christian witness and service. The pastor's role also includes an entire complex of administrative and leadership tasks. Souls are entrusted to his care, the truth is entrusted to his stewardship, and eternal realities hang in the balance. Who can fulfill this job description?

Of course, the answer is that no man can fulfill this calling. The Christian pastor must continually acknowledge his absolute dependence upon the grace and mercy of God. As the apostle Paul instructs us, we are but earthen vessels employed for God's glory. On his own, no man is up to this task.<sup>1</sup>

These words actually apply to both men and women called by God to be pastors or church leaders. Although the stresses and burdens of pastoral ministry have been highlighted for some time, recent research and surveys

have revealed that the majority of pastors are significantly happy, satisfied, or fulfilled in their ministries. However, a smaller study of over 1,000 pastors attending conferences in Southern California reported that about 90 percent experienced frequent fatigue and had thoughts of quitting ministry.<sup>2</sup> It has also been pointed out that there are around 350,000 churches in North America and that 3,500 of them (1 percent) die every year. Furthermore, about 1,500 ministers or pastors leave their ministries each month for reasons including loss of their jobs or retirement, but a significant number quit because of burnout and other health and family issues. It is estimated that 3,000 new churches are being planted every year, but more churches are closing down than being planted in North America.<sup>3</sup>

These statistics, of course, do not apply to some parts of the world where churches are actually growing and multiplying as the Holy Spirit works in wonderful and sometimes miraculous ways—for example, in parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, pastors everywhere face unique challenges, including spiritual warfare, and the stresses of ministry are real. A biblical perspective on pastoral and church ministry is needed for pastors to be able to serve their churches and shepherd God’s people in a Christ-centered, biblically based, and Spirit-filled way. Pastors are called to faithful and fruitful servanthood in Christ, which will be more fully described and explicated under two major headings: (1) a biblical perspective on the church and (2) a biblical perspective on pastoral ministry, focusing on shepherding God’s people as God’s servant.

## A Biblical Perspective on the Church (Ecclesiology)

Ecclesiology, or the doctrine of the church, has often been approached from a pragmatic or functional perspective, focusing more on what churches actually do and the polity or practices of a local church.<sup>5</sup> However, a more theological and biblical perspective of the church, or biblical ecclesiology, has been the focus of some recent authors.

We first need to clarify the meaning of the Greek word *ecclesia* (or *ekklesia*), often translated in the New Testament as “church” in English. Ed Silvano has pointed out that *ekklesia* is the word translated as “assembly” in Acts 19:32, 39, 41 but as “church” 112 times in other parts of the New Testament.<sup>6</sup> He emphasized that the first description of *ekklesia*, or assembly of the disciples or Christ followers after Pentecost, was in the context of having a meal or eating together: “they were seen *continually* devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread [eating] and to prayer.”<sup>7</sup>

*Ekklesia* was therefore flowing into everyday life such as at mealtimes. Jesus transformed tables into pulpits and ordinary homes into assembly places where strangers were warmly welcomed and the gospel shared with them. He therefore did not limit the assembly or gathering of his disciples to buildings or scheduled, centralized meetings; rather, his *ekklesia*, or church (assembly), was wherever and whenever his disciples gathered together, with him and his presence among them.<sup>8</sup>

The church, then, is the assembly or gathering of God's people as disciples of Christ and others who may be strangers or friends, anywhere and anytime, including out there in the marketplace and in homes where real life happens and not necessarily within the confines or walls of a church building. Silviso then provided five key paradigms for understanding church, or *ekklesia*, biblically so that both pulpit and marketplace ministers serve together as equal partners:

1. The Great Commission is about discipling nations and not just individuals (Matt. 28:19).
2. The atonement secured redemption not only for individuals but also for the marketplace, which is the heart of the nation (Luke 19:10; see also Eph. 1:7–10; Col. 1:19–20).
3. Labor is worship, and since all believers are ministers, they are to turn their jobs into places of worship to God and ministry to others (Col. 3:23; see also Gal. 6:9–10; Eph. 2:10).
4. Jesus is the One who builds this church, not us. Our assignment is to use the keys of the kingdom to lock and unlock the gates of hades in order for him to build his church where those gates stand (Matt. 16:18–19).
5. The elimination of systemic poverty in its four dimensions—spiritual, relational, motivational, and material—is the premier *social* indicator of transformation (Luke 4:18; see also Acts 4:32–34; Gal. 2:10; Rev. 21:24–27).<sup>9</sup>

The church has also been described as “the living reality of the living God”<sup>10</sup> and as “the family of God.”<sup>11</sup> Although defining the church based on the New Testament is not easy, because there are different and various views of the church, Gregg Allison has emphasized that the church refers to the people of God, or “the communion of saints,” made up of particular or peculiar people called “sojourners and strangers” (1 Pet. 2:11).<sup>12</sup> Gerald Bray recently pointed out that the apostles did not have a clear and systematic view of what the church should be, but they knew deep inside what it was and expressed it

when appropriate. Their thinking about church can be best summarized by the words of the apostle Peter: “You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . . You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people” (1 Pet. 2:5, 9–10 ESV).<sup>13</sup>

John MacArthur has asserted that the most honorable and serious responsibility as well as the highest privilege one can have with the greatest eternal significance is to serve in church ministry. Such service requires a correct understanding of the church and its ministries, with ten fundamental truths:

1. The church is the only institution that our Lord promised to build and to bless (Matt. 16:18).
2. The church is the gathering place of true worshipers (Phil. 3:3).
3. The church is the most precious assembly on earth since Christ purchased it with his own blood (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 5:25; Col. 1:20; 1 Pet. 1:18; Rev. 1:5).
4. The church is the earthly expression of the heavenly reality (Matt. 6:10; 18:18).
5. The church will ultimately triumph both universally and locally (Matt. 16:18; Phil. 1:6).
6. The church is the realm of spiritual fellowship (Heb. 10:22–25; 1 John 1:3, 6–7).
7. The church is the proclaimer and protector of divine truth (1 Tim. 3:15; Titus 2:1, 15).
8. The church is the chief place for spiritual edification and growth (Acts 20:32; Eph. 4:11–16; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; 1 Pet. 2:1–2; 2 Pet. 3:18).
9. The church is the launching pad for world evangelization (Mark 16:15; Titus 2:11).
10. The church is the environment where strong spiritual leadership develops and matures (2 Tim. 2:2).<sup>14</sup>

The New Testament, as Ed Hayes has pointed out, contains various images or descriptions of the church, such as the church militant (on earth) and triumphant (in heaven) (1 Thess. 4:15–5:10); a fellowship or community (Acts 2:42, 43–47); the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 1:22–23; 4:15–16); God’s

household or family (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:14, 15; 2 Tim. 2:20–21); the building of God (1 Cor. 3:9; Eph. 2:20–22; 1 Pet. 2:4–6); the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:32; Rev. 19:7); and the flock of God (John 10:11, 14; 21:15–19; Acts 20:28–29; 1 Pet. 5:2). Other images or metaphors for the church include the temple of the Holy Spirit, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a mystery, a vineyard, the heavenly Jerusalem or the city of God, and the pillar and ground of truth.<sup>15</sup>

## **A Biblical Perspective on Pastoral Ministry: Shepherding God’s People as God’s Servant**

Having a correct biblical perspective on what it means to serve as a pastor (or church leader) is just as crucial as having the multifaceted but biblical perspective on the church that we just reviewed. Pastoral theology is as important as ecclesiology. There are various models of ministry in the New Testament, and therefore there are multiple New Testament patterns for pastoral leadership and ministry in the church, depending on the needs of a particular church, as Derek Tidball has pointed out.<sup>16</sup>

Yet it is still important to emphasize that a pastor or church leader is primarily a shepherd (or undershepherd) of God’s people, or the church. The pastor is a faithful and fruitful *servant* of Jesus Christ and his church, before any leadership models or roles are assumed. Biblical servanthood is central and foundational in the Christian life and ministry, including church ministry and pastoring.<sup>17</sup> Leadership does not come first, not even so-called servant leadership. Servanthood, pure and simple, has to do with being a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ: one who serves him and others, including the church, in loving, humble, obedient ways, in union and communion with him or by abiding in him (John 15:15), that result in much fruit that lasts for eternity. Such biblical servanthood means serving our Best Friend, Jesus, the Lord and Head of the church and the universe. Pastoral ministry then involves faithful and fruitful servanthood in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, focusing on shepherding God’s people and not on secular, corporate models of leadership that are more CEO and managerial in emphasis and orientation. This does not mean that leadership is not important or valid. It is. However, leadership cannot be primary because servanthood is primary according to Scripture—servanthood that is founded on our essential identity in Christ and that takes place in union and communion with him as his beloved (John 15:5; Col. 3:12).

So what is a biblical perspective on pastoral ministry, or pastoring? Let’s begin by briefly discussing the calling from the Lord to pastoral ministry.<sup>18</sup>

There is a general calling to all Christians to serve the Lord in the different and manifold ministries of Christ and his church, locally and/or globally. There is also a more specific calling that he gives to some Christians to enter into paid vocational work as a pastor, usually full time. This specific calling can include a strong inner conviction of a calling from the Lord to pastoral ministry, sometimes based on Scripture and prayer, or a prophetic word from the Holy Spirit directly spoken into one's heart or indirectly through a sermon, a reading, a mentor or other person, an experience or circumstance, or some other means God uses. A specific call will also usually include or require some external validation and confirmation from other church leaders—such as pastors and elders or other spiritual mentors and significant others in one's life—and eventually licensing and ordination in churches where pastors are ordained.

Some helpful questions to ask in discerning whether a person may be specifically called to pastoral ministry include the following from Dave Harvey:

- Are you godly?
- How is your home?
- Can you preach?
- Can you shepherd?
- Do you love the lost?
- Who agrees?<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, Gordon Smith has suggested these questions for discerning one's vocation more generally:

- What on earth is God doing?
- Who are you?
- What is your life stage?
- What are your life circumstances?
- What is the cross you will have to bear?
- What are you afraid of?<sup>20</sup>

In terms of what pastoral ministry and leadership in the church should look like, there has been much emphasis on strong and visionary leadership that is based on corporate CEO models that tend to view the church as an organization to be managed and run like any other corporation rather than as a living organism in Christ. This approach is potentially dangerous if the

biblical, foot-washing servanthood exemplified by Christ (John 13:1–17) and the shepherd model of pastoring (John 10:11, 14; 21:15–19; Acts 20:28–29; 1 Pet. 5:2) are not given their places of primacy as taught in Scripture. However, more recently there has also been an encouraging development in the publication of books written from a biblical perspective that warn us against simply following business or CEO models for pastoral leadership and ministry in the church. More biblical models of pastors called to be spiritual shepherds of God’s people have been rightly advocated and emphasized.<sup>21</sup> Scriptural criteria for spiritual maturity in New Testament texts—such as 1 Timothy 3:1–12 and Titus 1:5–9—for selecting church leaders and pastors are therefore crucial and essential. The biblical emphasis is for pastors and church leaders to be faithful and fruitful servants in Christ who are willing to be countercultural—to be “unnecessary” pastors, as Marva Dawn and Eugene Peterson have asserted (unnecessary according to the world’s secular criteria for effective leadership that focus on false expectations of charisma and success, growing numbers and wielding power).<sup>22</sup>

The word “pastor,” transliterated from the Latin word *pastor*, actually means “shepherd,” with the connotation of feeding a flock of sheep. The Greek word in the New Testament for pastor is *poimen*, again usually translated as “shepherd.”<sup>23</sup> Jesus is described in John 10:11, 14 as the “good shepherd” (*poimen*) who lays down his life for the sheep. He is also called the “great shepherd” of the sheep (Heb. 13:20) who keeps on caring for us, and the “Chief Shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:4) who will return in his second coming with eternal rewards for his servants that will never fade away. Pastors therefore follow Jesus as the Chief Shepherd and Head of the church, to serve as his shepherds or undershepherds of his people, or flock of sheep.

The New Testament also emphasizes pastoral and church ministry as shepherding God’s people. For example, in Acts 20:28–29 Paul gave the following charge to the pastoral leaders of the church at Ephesus: “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.”

In John 21:15–19, Jesus himself restored Peter to the pastoral or shepherding ministry after he had denied Christ three times by instructing Peter to feed his sheep or lambs and take care of them, out of Peter’s love for him, which was affirmed three times:

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?”

He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

One more example from the New Testament that points to pastoral ministry as shepherding God’s people is 1 Peter 5:1–5:

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed. Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”

Simon Chan, in *Spiritual Theology*, concluded from Scripture as well as from church history that the distinguishing mark of pastoral ministry or vocation should be as follows:

In the modern church, the role of the pastor is no longer clear cut. The pastor is expected to do a lot of things but is not sure which is “the one thing needful” (Luke 10:42), the essential duty. The recovery of spiritual direction in recent years has once again drawn the attention to the main focus of pastoral care, namely, to help Christians develop their prayer life and discover the will of God. For much of the history of the church, the work of the pastor was quite unambiguous: the “cure of souls.” The shepherd is to help the sheep assimilate and live out the spiritual life. In short, the pastor is essentially a spiritual theologian and a guide to godliness. It is this work and nothing else that gives the pastoral vocation its distinguishing mark.<sup>24</sup>

The pastor, as primarily the shepherd of God's people, is called to spiritual leadership in the church that is not easy or glamorous. John MacArthur has pointed out that Paul in 2 Timothy 2 describes the demands of such leadership using seven metaphors. The pastor is "a teacher (v. 2), a soldier (v. 3), an athlete (v. 5), a farmer (v. 6), a workman (v. 15), a vessel (vv. 20–21), and a slave (v. 24). All such images evoke ideas of sacrifice, labor, service, and hardship. They speak eloquently of the complex and varied responsibilities of spiritual leadership. Not one of them makes leadership out to be glamorous. Its requirements are blameless character, spiritual maturity, and above all, a willingness to serve humbly."<sup>25</sup> He went on to emphasize that the favorite metaphor Jesus used to describe spiritual leadership, including pastoral leadership and ministry, "was that of a shepherd—a person who tends God's flock. Every church leader is a shepherd. The word *pastor* itself means 'shepherd.' It is appropriate imagery. A shepherd leads, feeds, nurtures, comforts, corrects, and protects."<sup>26</sup> In Jeremiah 3:15, the Lord promised his people, "I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding." He also condemned the false and selfish shepherds of Israel who cared only about themselves and their selfish gain and did not truly care for the sheep of Israel (see Isa. 56:10–11; Ezek. 34:1–16). The Lord himself will be like a shepherd who will feed his flock and take good and gentle care of them (Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:15).

A shepherd ultimately serves with love, the agape love of Jesus (John 13:34–35). Wes Roberts and Glenn Marshall, writing about God's original intent or purpose for the church, put it this way: "True shepherds are willing to bear the scars, the disappointments, and the hardships of the task because they care deeply for their sheep. One thing is true, if we're going to shepherd our flocks like Jesus: it's about love."<sup>27</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that a pastor is to serve with love as a shepherd, a spiritual theologian, and a guide to godliness, as Simon Chan and others have emphasized from a biblical and church history perspective. However, there may be congregations or churches out there that are looking for a very different kind of pastor, one who functions more as a CEO prepared to manage a religious corporation called the church. Pastors need to resist the ever-present temptation to please such congregations or churches and remain steadfast, with God's grace, to serve as shepherds, spiritual theologians, and guides to godliness or deeper Christlikeness for God's people. In this context, Peterson has strong but good spiritual medicine for us:

And we are unnecessary to what *congregations* insist that we must do and be: as the experts who help them stay ahead of the competition. . . . They want

pastors who lead. . . . Congregations get their idea of what makes a pastor from the culture, not from the Scriptures: they want a winner; they want their needs met; they want to be part of something zesty and glamorous. . . . With hardly an exception they don't want pastors at all—they want managers of their religious company. They want a pastor they can follow so they won't have to bother with following Jesus anymore.<sup>28</sup>

John Piper has also biblically and strongly critiqued the professionalism or professionalization of pastoral ministry that focuses on expertise, knowledge, skills, and our own competence and abilities to succeed as pastors: “We pastors are being killed by the professionalizing of the pastoral ministry. The mentality of the professional is not the mentality of the prophet. It is not the mentality of the slave of Christ. Professionalism has nothing to do with the essence and heart of the Christian ministry. The more professional we long to be, the more spiritual death we will leave in our wake. For there is no professional childlikeness (Matt. 18:3); there is no professional tenderheartedness (Eph. 4:32); there is no professional panting after God (Ps. 42:1).”<sup>29</sup>

The following prayer from Piper is a fitting conclusion to this first chapter covering a biblical perspective on pastoral and church ministry: “Banish professionalism from our midst, O God, and in its place put passionate prayer, poverty of spirit, hunger for God, rigorous study of holy things, white-hot devotion to Jesus Christ, utter indifference to all material gain, and unremitting labor to rescue the perishing, perfect the saints, and glorify our sovereign Lord. In Jesus' great and powerful name. Amen.”<sup>30</sup>

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# 2

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## The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit as Crucial and Essential for Pastoral Ministry

The person and work of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of our Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), are crucial and essential in the Christian life in general and in all Christian ministries and work and therefore for all Christians, not just pastors and church leaders. Although we may have different theological or denominational views concerning the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology),<sup>1</sup> and conflicting perspectives unfortunately still exist that can be divisive,<sup>2</sup> we can all agree that the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit are also crucial and essential in faithful and fruitful pastoral and church ministry. Christian ministry, including pastoral ministry, can be described as “participating in what God is already doing in Christ in the power of the Spirit,” or dancing in the dark with the Triune God, in the light of Christ, into the darkness or dark places of this fallen world, as Graham Buxton has put it.<sup>3</sup>

### Basic Biblical Truths about the Holy Spirit

R. T. Kendall has succinctly summarized twenty-one things every Christian should know about the Holy Spirit according to the Bible:

1. The Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:4; 2 Cor. 3:17).
2. The Holy is a person (John 14:16; 16:8).

3. The Holy Spirit is eternal (Gen. 1:1; Heb. 9:14).
4. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17; 16:13).
5. The Holy Spirit was involved in creation (Gen. 1:2).
6. The Holy Spirit, using people, wrote the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21).
7. The Holy Spirit is our teacher (John 14:26; 1 John 2:27).
8. The Holy Spirit can be grieved (Eph. 4:30).
9. The Holy Spirit can be quenched (1 Thess. 5:19).
10. The Holy Spirit will be the One who convicts (John 16:8).
11. The Holy Spirit is our guide (John 16:13).
12. The Holy Spirit speaks only what the Father gives him to say (John 16:13).
13. The Holy Spirit will predict the future (John 16:13).
14. The Holy Spirit will glorify Jesus Christ (John 16:14).
15. The Holy Spirit can be blasphemed (Matt. 12:31).
16. The Holy Spirit is our reminder (John 14:26).
17. The Holy Spirit gives power (Acts 1:8).
18. The Holy Spirit manifests through various spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:7–10).
19. The Holy Spirit directs people to Jesus and makes him real (John 6:63, 65; 15:26).
20. The Holy Spirit manifests through various fruit (Gal. 5:22–23).
21. The Holy Spirit gives renewed power (Acts 4:31).<sup>4</sup>

In Ephesians 5:18 we are commanded to “be [continually] filled with the Spirit,” and Kendall therefore concludes, “We need to be filled—again and again.”<sup>5</sup>

### How to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit

Douglas Gregg and I wrote a book, *Disciplines of the Holy Spirit*,<sup>6</sup> on how to connect to the Spirit’s power and presence using the traditional spiritual disciplines as power connectors (e.g., solitude and silence, listening and guidance, prayer and intercession, study and meditation, repentance and confession, yielding and submission, fasting, worship, fellowship, simplicity, service, and witness). Of course, the Holy Spirit can work in many ways besides through the traditional spiritual disciplines, such as through authentic disciplines, or circumstantial spiritual disciplines (e.g., selflessness, waiting, suffering, persecution, social mercy, forgiveness, mourning, contentment, sacrifice, hope,

and fear).<sup>7</sup> The Holy Spirit, as God, is sovereign and can work in his own mysterious and spontaneous ways to anoint us and fall afresh on us (although he is already in us, if we are Christians) at any time without us doing anything or taking any steps. The Holy Spirit is also everywhere and has worked in all kinds of people, circumstances, and situations, including the whole realm of creation, throughout history.<sup>8</sup>

The following are some of the blessings of the Spirit-filled life: “greater love and intimacy with God; exaltation of Jesus as Son of God and Savior; power and boldness to witness and preach; greater wisdom and faith; deep joy (singing and worship); release of spiritual gifts for ministry; victory over sin and temptation; effectiveness and power through prayer; quiet confidence during opposition; deeper trust in Scripture as the Word of God; renewed zeal for evangelism; and fresh love of Christ and others.”<sup>9</sup> However, the Holy Spirit can at times also lead us, as he led Jesus, into the wilderness to face temptations and spiritual warfare and sometimes dark nights of the soul (see Matt. 4:1; Luke 4:1–2). The book of Acts shows that the filling of the Spirit can lead to dramatic external manifestations, such as speaking in tongues (see 2:1–4; 10:44–47; 19:1–7), or less dramatic and more quiet experiences, such as boldness in preaching or witnessing, deeper faith and wisdom, and greater joy (see 4:8, 31; 6:3, 5; 11:24; 13:52).

The Holy Spirit’s presence and power are essential in our lives as well as in pastoral and church ministries. It is “‘not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty” (Zech. 4:6), that his work is done. Jesus himself tells us that “apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). We therefore need to yield to the Holy Spirit and ask to be filled with him. We are then empowered by the Spirit not to grieve him (Eph. 4:30) with the sins of the flesh or the sinful nature (e.g., bitterness, rage and anger, brawling, slander, and malice) and not to quench him or put out the Spirit’s fire (1 Thess. 5:19) with unbelief and evil.

How then can we as pastors and servants of Jesus Christ, whose own life and ministry on earth were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1, 14–15; Acts 10:38) to the glory of the Father, also be filled with the Spirit? Without trying to be simplistic or formulaic, Gregg and I suggested five approaches to being filled with the Spirit:

1. We confess our sins and receive God’s forgiveness and cleansing through the precious blood of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:9). The Holy Spirit fills cleansed vessels.
2. We yield or surrender every area of our lives to the control of the Holy Spirit under Christ’s lordship (Rom. 12:1–2). Of course, we never do

this perfectly or completely but as best and as sincerely as we can from our hearts.

3. We ask by faith to be filled with the Holy Spirit in obedience to Ephesians 5:18, which makes this command. This is something we should seek continually—every day and moment by moment. Jesus reassures us that it is our heavenly Father’s will to “give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him” (Luke 11:13).
4. We give thanks to God by faith for answering our prayer or request to be filled with the Spirit, because it is according to his will and command in Ephesians 5:18 and he answers prayers that are in alignment with his will (1 John 5:14–15).
5. We trust and expect God to do great things, because he is a great God who is almighty, who does extraordinary things in ordinary people such as you and me.<sup>10</sup>

Again, the great things God does through the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives are great in his sight—they need not be dramatic or spectacular or successful or relevant from a secular, worldly perspective. They are often simple, childlike, ordinary things made great and extraordinary because of the touch of the Almighty God himself, especially manifesting the greatest thing of all, agape love, the fruit of the Spirit (1 Cor. 13; Gal. 5:22–23). God can, of course, also do great things such as signs and wonders involving miracles, healings, deliverances from evil spirits, and explosive church growth with hundreds or thousands coming to Christ, as he did in the book of Acts and in the charismatic and Pentecostal movements of the twentieth century and today.

I have shared elsewhere in my book on servanthood that we should not so much try to do *great things* for God but simply and humbly do things for a *great God*.<sup>11</sup> The emphasis of true servanthood in Christ is on the great God to whom be all the glory and not on the great things per se that often draw glory to us. The great God may ask us to do nothing for a season but to rest in him, to be with him in the wilderness of solitude and silence and sabbaths. He may ask us to do little or small things with great love (which is in essence the greatest thing!), such as bringing chicken soup to a sick neighbor or driving an elderly person across town for a doctor’s appointment or tutoring an inner-city kid as a volunteer. And then the great God may at times ask us to do a great or big thing but only for his glory, such as growing a church from fifty to five hundred and even five thousand in five years. But it is all up to God, not us. We need to die to our own selfish ambitions,<sup>12</sup> surrender to his will, and

let his kingdom come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven, as Jesus taught us to pray (Matt. 6:10), and not build or advance our own kingdoms.

Here is a brief prayer that may be helpful for those of us who want to ask for the filling of the Holy Spirit, that we may be anointed with fire from above and be empowered to become more like Jesus in our character and to do more of the works of Jesus in our ministries:

Dear Father, I come to you and ask in the Name of Jesus for you to cleanse me and fill me with the Holy Spirit and his power and presence, so that I can become more like Jesus in my life and ministries. Thank you so much. In Jesus' Name, Amen!

While these five steps and the suggested prayer for being filled with the Spirit can be helpful, they are not necessary. As mentioned earlier, the Holy Spirit, as God, is sovereign, and he can work in his own sovereign and spontaneous ways to fill us and anoint us afresh with his presence and his power, all by God's sheer grace and goodness and generosity, without us doing anything (e.g., practicing spiritual disciplines) or taking any steps. As Anthony Thiselton has emphasized, the "ascending" ministry of the Spirit, related to initiating and inspiring prayer, worship, and thanksgiving, is as important and parallel to his "descending" ministry of inspiration and empowerment.<sup>13</sup> We need the Holy Spirit's ministry and help even in the practice of spiritual disciplines, such as prayer and worship. Therefore, it is not by self-effort or dependence on our own skills, giftings, methods, or competence that we serve the Lord. It is in dependence on the Lord, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, that we become like Jesus and do the works of Jesus in our pastoral and church ministries. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love<sup>14</sup> who moves us to love God and others, even our enemies, and to live out that love in our lives and ministries for others, even unto death if need be. We read in Romans 5:5, "And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

In John 7:38–39 Jesus says, "'Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive." He therefore reassured his disciples, anticipating his death and resurrection and ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit as their Advocate, that these things would all be good for them: "But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). Having the Holy Spirit inside us at the moment of our conversion to Christ when the Spirit baptizes us into the body

of Christ is a special blessing (1 Cor. 12:13), but we need to continually be filled with the Spirit afterward (Eph. 5:18). With the presence and the power of the Spirit in us, we are enabled by him to do the works of Jesus and even “greater things” (in seeing even more people come to Christ and be saved and disciples), as Jesus himself promised us: “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12). The work of the Holy Spirit is therefore essential for faithful and fruitful pastoral and church ministries.

## The Work of the Holy Spirit

The work of the Holy Spirit can be described in various ways, but it includes three major aspects from a biblical perspective: the Spirit’s power and gifts, the Spirit’s truth, and the Spirit’s fruit.<sup>15</sup>

### *The Spirit’s Power and Gifts*

As already mentioned, the power of the Holy Spirit is essential in our Christian lives and ministries, including evangelism and witnessing (Acts 1:8). Therefore, we need to be continually filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), to walk in or by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16) so we do not gratify the desires of the flesh or the sinful nature, and to keep in step with the Spirit since we live by the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). As we prayerfully surrender our lives to the Holy Spirit’s control and ask to be filled with the Spirit, he empowers and helps us in our Christian lives and ministries. He often does this by supernaturally and sovereignly manifesting himself in us through spiritual gifts, which Paul defined in 1 Corinthians 12:7 as a “manifestation” (*phanerosis* in Greek) of the Holy Spirit. Sam Storms has helpfully pointed out, “*The gifts are God himself working in and through us.* They are concrete, often tangible, visible and vocal disclosures of divine power showcased through human activity. A *charisma* or gift of the Spirit is the Holy Spirit himself coming to clear and sometimes dramatic expression in the lives of God’s people as they minister one to another.”<sup>16</sup> Storms encouraged all of us, whatever our denominational background and whether we are charismatic or not, to welcome the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including the more dramatic gifts of healing, prophecy, and deliverance; to worship in the Spirit, providing practical steps as to how to do so; and to keep in step with the Spirit.

Peter Wagner described twenty-eight spiritual gifts based on Scripture (e.g., see Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4; 1 Pet. 4) using a spiritual gifts inventory that

may be helpful for discovering and then using one's spiritual gifts for the blessing of others and the building up of the church. They are prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, mercy, wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, discerning of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues, apostle, helps, administration, evangelist, pastor, celibacy, voluntary poverty, martyrdom, hospitality, missionary, intercession, deliverance, and leading worship.<sup>17</sup> Neil Cole has particularly emphasized the five spiritual gifts of Jesus for reigniting the church with "primal fire," based on Ephesians 4:11–13: focusing on the apostolic gift (apostle) with contagious empowerment, the prophetic gift (prophet) with contagious insight, the evangelistic gift (evangelist) with contagious compassion, the shepherding gift (pastor) with contagious unity, and the teaching gift (teacher) with contagious learning.<sup>18</sup> Other authors have interpreted spiritual gifts not as special *abilities* given to us by the Holy Spirit (the conventional view) but rather as different *ministries* that the Holy Spirit calls us to be involved in to strengthen and build up the church, or the body of Christ.<sup>19</sup>

Spiritual gifts that may be particularly helpful for an effective people-helping or counseling ministry, including pastoral care and counseling in the church, are the gifts of exhortation or encouragement (Rom. 12:8), healing (1 Cor. 12:9, 28), wisdom or a word of wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8), knowledge or a word of knowledge (1 Cor. 12:8), discerning of spirits (1 Cor. 12:10), and mercy (Rom. 12:8). From a more charismatic or Pentecostal perspective, the following spiritual gifts may also be important and relevant for a counseling ministry: prophecy, teaching, faith, miracles, tongues, and intercession.

### *The Spirit's Truth*

The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth in John 14:16–17 and 16:13. He will teach us and guide us into all truth, including psycho-theological truth in the counseling context. He will remind us of all that Jesus taught or said and reveal to us what is to come. The Spirit also inspired the writing of Scripture as God's Word. He will anoint and empower us as pastors and church leaders to teach and preach God's Word and truth in a way that will transform lives and set people free (John 8:32). He will also guide us to use Scripture in our counseling ministries in sensitive, empathic, and deeply helpful ways with our clients or parishioners. The Holy Spirit will never contradict the truth of Scripture, properly interpreted and illuminated by him. His work in all our pastoral responsibilities as we shepherd God's people, including pastoral care, counseling, preaching, and teaching, will always be consistent with the truths of Scripture, including its moral and ethical teachings.

### *The Spirit's Fruit*

The fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22–23 refers mainly to Christlike love, or *agapē* in Greek, which is characteristic of mature Christlikeness (Rom. 8:29), the goal and will of God for all his people and the church. It is the Holy Spirit who produces the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22–23). We cannot manufacture or fake such Christlike fruit, which comes forth by the work of the Holy Spirit within us as we abide in Christ (John 15:5). Such agape love from the Spirit of love is not only powerfully therapeutic or healing in counseling ministries but also essential in all our pastoral and church ministries, for without love we are nothing and have accomplished nothing (1 Cor. 13).

All three major aspects of the Holy Spirit's work (power, truth, and love) are crucial in our Christian lives and ministries, and they need to exist in biblical balance. As I have concluded, "Power without love often results in abuse. Power without truth can become heresy. However, power based on truth and used with Christlike love can produce renewal and revival as well as the deep and substantial healing of broken lives."<sup>20</sup>

### **The Work of the Holy Spirit in Counseling**

This chapter ends by exploring how the Holy Spirit can work in the specific context of counseling or helping people, whether in lay counseling, pastoral care and counseling, or professional therapy, serving as one concrete example of how essential the Spirit is in pastoral ministries. He can work implicitly (quietly or covertly) or explicitly (obviously or overtly) as we minister to people in counseling contexts. There are at least five ways the Spirit can help us during a counseling session.

First, the Holy Spirit can provide specific words of knowledge or wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8) to directly help the Christian counselor or pastor more quickly and accurately get to the root problems of the client or parishioner who is being seen for counseling. Charles Swindoll, writing from a more conservative perspective, has described similar experiences of receiving words of knowledge or wisdom as "inner promptings" or nudges from the Spirit.<sup>21</sup> We can be more mindfully aware of and open to the Spirit during a counseling session by using flash prayers from time to time—for example, praying, "Spirit of God, please guide me," "Holy Spirit, please touch the client with your comfort and grace," and "Holy Spirit, grant us wisdom and clarity."

Second, the Holy Spirit can reveal God's will more clearly to both the counselor and the client (or the pastor and the parishioner) and thus give them spiritual direction as they engage in explicit integration practices during a counseling session—for example, praying together, exploring spiritual issues, and/or reading and sharing Scripture together. The Spirit can provide such spiritual direction more implicitly or quietly when such practices are not appropriate, such as when a pastor is counseling a non-Christian client who is not interested in or open to engaging in spiritual disciplines or practices.

Third, the Holy Spirit can directly touch a client in a spontaneous way with his loving grace and healing power according to his sovereign will and timing. This can happen anytime! However, using prayer and especially inner healing prayer, or the healing of memories, can be particularly helpful in facilitating the healing work of the Spirit in such special transcendent moments during a counseling session.

Fourth, the Holy Spirit can help the counselor or pastor with the discerning of spirits (1 Cor. 12:10) or simply spiritual discernment to determine more clearly whether there may be demonization or demonic oppression in the client's life and to differentiate between demonization and mental illness. Sometimes both may be present in a particular client. The Holy Spirit can also empower the counselor or pastor to conduct effective prayers for deliverance and protection from the demonic, if this is necessary, but with informed consent from and collaboration with the client. At times, referring a client to a prayer ministry team experienced in deliverance may be more appropriate.

Fifth, and finally, the Holy Spirit can work a deep and substantial spiritual transformation in the client as well as in the counselor or pastor as they practice the traditional spiritual disciplines (e.g., prayer, silence, Scripture reading and meditation, confession and repentance, forgiveness, inner healing prayer, etc.) in the power of the Spirit during the counseling session or between sessions as homework assignments for the client (and the counselor or pastor too). The Holy Spirit can sovereignly and supernaturally bring both the client and the counselor to deeper levels of spiritual growth or transformation into greater Christlikeness. It is therefore not true that a counselor or pastor can lead a client only as far as the counselor or pastor has gone spiritually and psychologically. The Holy Spirit can bring both the counselor or pastor and the client beyond their present levels. This is God's sovereign work of grace, and therefore to God be the glory!<sup>22</sup>

The work of the Holy Spirit in Christian counseling, including pastoral care and counseling, is therefore crucial. Counseling skills and training are still needed and helpful, but they should always be used in dependence on the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Spirit's work is essential in every aspect of pastoral

ministry, not just in pastoral care and counseling—for example, in preaching and teaching; corporate worship; intentional discipling and spiritual formation; evangelism, missions, and social concern; leadership; mentoring of church staff and lay volunteer coworkers; church boards, budgets, and buildings; weddings and funerals; small groups and fellowships; integrity and ethics; and leaving and retiring, all of which will be covered in part 2 of this book.

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