

Pastoral burnout is seemingly at an all-time high. One 2022 Barna study said 42% of Pastors in the U.S. were considering leaving FT ministry. Almost half on the fence about bailing. That's tough. Last year, Lifeway Research's data found that burnout is one of the top three reasons pastors actually leave the role — and the Hartford Institute for Religion Research found 53% of clergy had seriously considered leaving ministry at least once since 2020.¹

Now, on the one hand, we got some divas that need to man up. But on the other hand, there are unique challenges and a dude can easily be crushed under the responsibility. If he has no help, everything will fall on his lap. He'll bear the burdens of the entire church by himself. He will be expected to do everything and be at everything, to make all the hospital visits. Be on call 24/7, working 50-70 hours a week, usually underpaid, unrealistic expectations: must be warm-hearted, thick-skinned, up on current events as well as ancient ones, needs to grow the church just so long as it doesn't change the church, able to talk with a 5 year old and an 85 year old, knows the Bible in the original languages, gifted in Leadership and management, hiring and firing, evangelism, family counseling, needs to be a dynamic communicator, familiar with every idea from creation science to end-time charts, his children need to have somehow have missed original sin, pretty wife but not too pretty, that can play piano . . . you get the point. Heavy is the head.

I remember reading a Forbes article that two of the top ten hardest jobs and they included pastor and stay at home mom. / And sometimes sheep can bite their shepherds! Regularly criticism. Death by a thousand paper cuts. I have shown you this **video** before.² Dude just trying to keep the sheep alive. Well, today, we see a wise FiL help Moses implement the principle of plurality lest he get worn out. Let's consider the worship and wisdom of Jethro.

I. The Worship of Jethro (1-12) – Jethro the Midianite priest brings the family of Moses to join him in the wilderness. Moses does what all smart sons-in-law do: bows down to his father in law. And Moses bring him up to speed and Jethro rejoices. He has become a follower of the One True God. **8-10**. The word “delivered” is used four times in these three verses. Just like he said he would do back in Ch. 6: **6:6-8**. God can be trusted. He will keep his promises. He will bring to completion what he starts.

Jethro now *knows* the Lord is greater. The word for “know” in verse 11 has been used throughout Exodus: **6:7 8:10 9:29 10:1-2 14:4, 18**. All this, all creation and redemption is so that the Lord may be known. That's the point of it all. He wants his name known and revered. So Jesus taught us to pray hallowed be your name.

Friend, what does it mean for you if one of the Lord's main desires is to be known? In short, make the Lord known! What did Moses do here? He gave testimony. He tells what the Lord has done. **8**: Has the Lord done anything for you? Then you can do this. Just tell people. This week, who can you tell what the Lord has done? Think BC+AD. God Man Christ Response. / So Moses shares about what the Lord has done, Jethro gets saved and then what's climax? A meal. The climax of the Exodus is a meal. **24:8-11**. And of course these meals point forward to the eternal banquet.

II. The Wisdom of Jethro (13-27) – 13-16. Moses is the leader, the ruler, the judge. Remember back in ch. 2 a Hebrew mocked Moses: “Who made you a prince and a judge over us” (2:14)? But now, Moses is dealing with disputes all day long. He represents the ways of God for the people. God is the ultimate authority – always.

¹ <https://get.tithe.ly/blog/7-signs-of-pastoral-burnout>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39tumh4uBI4>

Can you imagine counseling all these ungrateful grumblers all day long? Moses is doing it all: all the sibling rivalry, the premarital counseling, marriage disputes, all the social disputes: he stole my sandals, his goat chewed up my tent, he's hogging the quail, stepping on my manna, family disputes: she won't meet me in the tent often enough, these kids aren't doing the Hebrew homeschool homework, on and on and on and on, morning till evening.

17-18 What you are doing is not good. You are going to wear out. That word is literally wither. You won't last. Moses, this system is not sustainable. There will be burnout, bottlenecks, and blind spots. You are a good visionary leader, but need some help with administration. You are a senior pastor but you need me as your executive pastor. Father in law has a better plan:

19-27 Look for men who meet 5 qualifications: able men (used of Boaz who was a worthy man Ruth 2:1), men who fear God, trustworthy men, and men who hate bribes. They can't be bought with money **23:8**. Moses, get some men of character who can help with the work. Jethro tells Moses that if you delegate and trust others, you will be able to endure. You only deal with the significant issues, but others can handle most of them.

This is an interesting part to include in the Exodus narrative, isn't it? Here we learn a principle of leadership. Several actually. Notice that Moses honors authority. He is also teachable. Willing to learn from sources outside his tribe. Focuses on character. We also learn the principle of plurality. Moving from OC Israel to the NC church, God's will is still plurality.

Now, there is a lot of debate church government (polity). RCC. Episcopal: apostolic succession with bishops over geographical diocese / Presbyterian: session - presbytery – synod – general assembly / Congregational / Deacon. Committee: Where minutes are kept but hours are lost. Their fav sport is the Indy 500 – they just go round and round without getting anywhere. There are two main problems with those: they are not in the Bible, but also the members are not vetted by Scriptural spiritual qualifications. So anyone with the time can serve on them. My first church was this way. Effectively led by unbelievers and spiritually immature believers. When I got there, the wife of one the of deacons expressed to me that her husband had no business being a deacon. And he was chair of the board! / Sr. Pastor as CEO

God cares: 1 Tim 3:14-15: "Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God" (NIV). Here at SS, we believe that God's Word teaches that the church is to be led by a plurality of elders. / ELC

BFM2000 on the church: Its two scriptural offices are that of pastor/elder/overseer and deacon. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor/elder/overseer is limited to men as qualified by Scripture. / Same office. Let me show you with a few passages:

Eph 4:11-12: "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors (*poimēn*) and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."

Comment: This is the *only* place in the NT that the noun "pastor" occurs. Elder 17x.

Titus 1:5-7: "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders (*presbuteros*) in every town, as I directed you. An elder (*presbuteros*) must be blameless,

faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer (*episkopē*) manages God's household, he must be blameless."

Comment: Clearly, for Paul an elder is an overseer.

1 Pet 5:1-2: "To the elders (*presbuteros*) among you, I appeal as a fellow elder (*presbuteros*) and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be pastors (*poimainō*) of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them." / *Comment:* Elders are called to pastor the flock.

Acts 20:17, 28: "From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders (*presbuteros*) of the church. . . . Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (*episkopē*). Be pastors (*poimainō*) of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood." / **Smothers Graphic**

An elder is an overseer is a pastor. So a board of elders is not just a group of decision-makers, but a group of pastors, of shepherd-leaders. The church is to be led by a *plurality* of elders. Everywhere in the NT, it is plural. There is no verse saying one man should lead the church, but always, everywhere a plurality.

Acts 14:21-23: "When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed." This is NT missions. Preach the gospel, make disciples, encourage perseverance, appoint elders plural in every church.

Just like Jethro, the Apostles advocated the principle of plurality. 1 Tim 5:17: "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching." Elders plural. / The church is to be led by a plurality of *spiritually-qualified* male elders. What matters most about an elder? Then and now: their character. Many a church has gotten in trouble because they chose competency over character. **1 Tim 3:1-7.** Only two skills: house and able to teach. Titus 1:9: "He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in *sound doctrine* and also to rebuke those who contradict it."

But the focus is character. Men, even if you do not desire to be an elder, you should strive after these qualifications. They are to be godly men who model what it looks like to follow Jesus. They are above reproach. The mud doesn't stick. We should be able to say, "Look to an elder and be like him." What elders must be, all men ought to be.

The benefits of the principle of plurality are at least ten-fold: Jethro could probably add more:

1. It is the biblical model.
2. It balances pastoral weakness.
3. It adds pastoral wisdom.
4. It enables corrective discipline of the staff if needed.
5. It increases confidence in the members of the church
6. It provides a stronger defense against false teaching.
7. It provides continuity of leadership

8. It provides pastors for pastors
9. It diffuses congregational criticism.
10. It protects against burnout by alleviating pressure and responsibility to one person

One guy can't do it. Ask Moses. Even though it can often shake out that way in churches. My title here is Lead pastor but did you know there is no office of "lead pastor" or "senior pastor" in the NT; only a plurality of elders/pastors/overseers. However, there is usually one man who bears the bulk of the Sunday morning preaching load. "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, *especially* those who labor in preaching and teaching."

As Timothy Witmer (modern day Jethro) puts it, "All who are called to be elders are called to the sheep-intensive work of shepherding. They are called to exercise their leadership *together* for the benefit of the flock. In many cases, probably because he is the one receiving a paycheck, the work of shepherding the people of God has fallen exclusively to the teaching elder or pastor. He is the one who visits the people. He is the one to whom people look for counsel. He is the one who is viewed as the 'shepherd' of the local congregation. However, given what we have seen about the centrality of the work of shepherding to those who are called to be elders, this makes no sense! How is the teaching elder supposed to have the time to give careful attention to the preaching and teaching ministry of the Word if he is charged with shepherding the *entire* flock as well? No, the biblical picture is of a shared responsibility among all of the elders for shepherding the flock. If anything, the teaching elder should have *less* responsibility in some shepherding functions so as to have sufficient time to carry out his responsibilities in preaching and teaching the flock. We look at the plethora of reports that come out year after year about pastoral burnout and the alarming number of clergy leaving their churches or leaving the ministry altogether. Might not one of the contributing facts be that they are not receiving the help they need in shepherding the flock prescribed in the Scriptures? Not only will our churches be healthier, but the work of the pastor will also be more manageable if all elders take seriously the work that Christ has called them to do in sharing the responsibility to shepherd the flock."³

But, in a healthy church and especially in a church this size, it can't land on the leadership. Plurality must be more than just the church leaders. We must have *meaningful* membership. Every member ministry. **Eph 4:7-16** / We need every member doing their part. As we move to two services this Fall, we need all hands on deck, especially with ministering to our kids. Serve QR code.

³ Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader*, 43-44.