



# 6 Qualities of a Loving Pastor



By Brian Thorstad

I've seen it repeatedly. When church members are surveyed regarding what they want in their church's next pastor, the attribute most frequently mentioned is "a loving caregiver" or "a loving shepherd."

However we may feel about the level of Christian maturity reflected in these results, this is reality and it's not lost on pastors.

Pastors find out quickly that if they want to earn "pastor points," if they want to be loved, if they want to get kudos, the thing to do is to be a phone ringing, hospital visiting, party hopping, card sending, event attending, birthday and anniversary remembering care-giver.

Many believe that pastors who do the things they need to do to *be seen* as loving shepherds *really* are the most loving shepherds. True? Let me suggest an alternative paradigm:

- 1) **Genuinely loving pastor/leaders love people out of a love tank filled by God.** They love people, but they don't *need* people. They have intimate, deeply satisfying relationships with God through Christ. They have strong and deep devotional lives.

*Sadly, some of the most attentive shepherds are motivated by a need to be loved, not by a desire to love.*

- 2) **Genuinely loving pastor/leaders give their flocks what they need, not what they want.** This is the same thing we have to do as parents. Selfish parents spoil their children, satisfying every whim of their little ones to avoid conflict and gain their children's approval.
- 3) **Genuinely loving pastor/leaders train others to do people care, so they can major on other priorities.** I know that churches are all different and I know that Scripture gives us a lot of freedom in how we write our leader's ministry descriptions. I also know that churches have varying needs and pastors have varying gifts.

But with that said, it's my observation that most churches need their senior pastors to focus on two aspects of pastoral ministry: leadership and training. (As important as preaching is to me, I've even taken to subsuming preaching under the heading of training.)

Other folks can be trained to do people care and some of them can do it better than I can. That means, of course, that they'll get the accolades instead of me. I can bear that because of the strength of my conviction that what my congregation needs is leadership and training.

- 4) **Genuinely loving pastor/leaders are able to face conflicts, rebuke sinful behaviors and guide churches through church discipline.** I recently heard a pastor described as being too loving to confront anyone. Nonsense. Real love often demands confrontation, for the benefit of those confronted as well as for the protection of their victims.
- 5) **Genuinely loving pastor/leaders say "no" to the good so they can say "yes" to the best.** It can be excruciatingly difficult to have to decline the request to party with the seniors, attend the women's Bible study or show your face at the youth group lock-in, but there's just no way around the need to say "no," graciously and often.
- 6) **Genuinely loving pastor/leaders take care of themselves so they can take care of others.** Most church members don't care if we take care of ourselves or not. If we want to work ourselves to death, our congregations will generally allow us to do so and replace us when we wear out.

But in taking care of ourselves, and making sure that people know that we're doing so, we are actually blessing the church by modeling healthy Christian lives.

It comes down to one question: Are we more concerned about *being* genuinely loving pastor/leaders or being *thought of* as genuinely loving pastor/leaders?

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