

Small Church

Help



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As one small church pastor to another, I hope this little book is a help to you. -Craig Poston

Train yourself to be godly. (1 Timothy 4:7)

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Section 1:

The Pastor

1

Don't Think Like a Big Church



You are a small church. Embrace that.

90% of churches around the world are under 200 people!

80% of churches worldwide are under 100.

In North America, 60% of Protestant churches are under 100.

Is the small church Jesus' plan to build His church? Jesus' norm is small healthy churches. Yes, there are mega churches, but the majority of Christians worship their Savior in a small church.

Reality check: God has called most pastors to pastor small churches. But most seminaries and Bible colleges focus on how to break the 200 barrier rather than how to healthily pastor a church under 200.

- When I took over Rainbow Community Church, we had 40 people and an older lady told me, “We know

you'll move on soon to a bigger church, but we're glad you are here now."

I was not intending on moving on to bigger things, but American church culture seems to assume this.

Pastor, you can be a healthy church of under 200 people. It does not mean you have no vision, are lazy, or lead poorly.

It means you are part of the 90% of churches worldwide that Jesus is establishing and blessing.

Benefits of a Small Church:

- The majority of **people want a small relational church**. They knew your church was small when they walked in, and they want that relationship aspect (most big churches are program-oriented not relationship-oriented by necessity of multiple services or multiple locations).
- **There are small churches around the world**. A large church in Turkey is 20 people! Turks are relational, not program-focused. To do ministry with them requires a small church relationship context.
- Small churches can **focus on planting small churches** over making their church bigger. Big churches have big buildings and a large staff, which makes their main focus on their "Jerusalem" and not as easily on being Jesus' witnesses "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).
- Small churches can **flourish in retirement communities** and impoverished areas that do not have the community resources or large buildings of urban

areas. Small churches can easily meet in homes or smaller buildings the smaller communities offer.

- In **restricted countries** where Christians are persecuted, small churches offer a way to be under the government's radar.
- Small churches can be **unique** to the culture or sub-culture of the community, whereas large churches have to have more standardized systems.
- Small churches can minister to those who want/need smaller, more intimate settings **with fewer people** in one space (for reasons of health or anxiety).
- Small churches can focus on big missions because there is **little administration** to divert attention and energy.
- Small churches are **humanly weak** and forced to greater dependance on God in faith
- Every congregation wants to be **pastored by their pastor**. That is not possible for large churches, but it is for small churches.
- Jesus' church started in a home with **120 people** (Acts 1:15).

Jesus blesses both large megachurches and small churches. I was on the pastoral staff of a church of 25,000 people, and I have pastored 40 people. I prefer the flexibility and personal nature of a small church.

I like to remember the time when my friend and I took the entire church of Smyrna in Izmir, Turkey, out to dinner after church service. Small churches make that type of fellowship possible.



2

You Have to be Webmaster



You have graduated from seminary or Bible college and are ready to take the reins of a local church and preach and lead and get the inevitable church growth happening.

Then, you find that you have to be the church's webmaster as well as the social media tech. You might even have to print your own bulletins. Usually there's no church secretary who will do these little tasks. It is a humble pill to swallow the first few Sundays.

Here are a few other things you thought you'd have staff to do, but it's just you:

- **You will have to do the budget.** You may never had done your own family budget, but now the church finances are you in your hands. Grab someone in the business field and ask for help.
- **You will have to lead the adult Bible study.** Whether it happens on a Sunday morning before

church or a Wednesday night, it won't happen and no one will come unless you lead it.

- **You have to oversee the children's ministry** until you can get the right person.
- **You will have to plan, promote, and lead any outreach event.** No one steps up to lead these, but they will be glad to help if you get the ball rolling.
- **You will have to lead the elder meetings.** I had 2 elders when I started at Rainbow Community Church. One was a wonderful Christian layman but age 85 and worn out by the battle of firing the last pastor and seeing the church dwindle to a dozen people. Really, he just wanted to close the church doors and retire to Tennessee. The other was younger than me and was made elder because he was the only other man left and just having one elder did not seem right. When I took over, the elderly elder stepped down and moved to Tennessee. He wanted to take the church bell that had been in the steeple since 1950. But, it was 300 lbs, so it stayed. With just the one inexperienced elder, the meeting agenda, leadership, and execution were all on me. It was like playing tennis against a wall.



3



Your Wife's New Role

Your wife will play the organ and lead us in worship, right?

When I was candidating at our small church, this was one of the questions the elders and congregation asked me.

I said that my wife did not play the organ, and she has never led worship. Right from the start, I had to clarify expectations.

“You are not hiring me and getting her too. You are hiring me as pastor.”

The elders meant well. Their paradigm was the previous pastor whose wife had played the organ and led worship, so they assumed mine would do the same.

Make your expectations clear when candidating with the church: You are hiring me, not me and my wife.

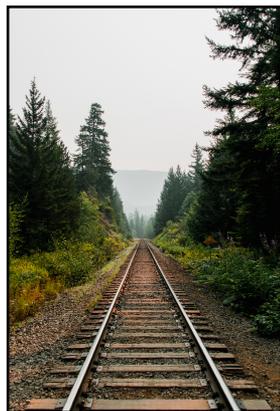
There will be expectations of your wife leading women's Bible studies or children's ministry.

I suggest she take six months to just be part of the church and get to know the church before she jumps into a ministry (I recommend this to all visitors, too). By virtue of being your wife, she will have authority presumed on her, so a publicly communicated six-month window will give her time to adjust to the new church family and build relationships without everyone pressuring her. Then she is free to engage in ministry as the Holy Spirit equips and leads her.



4

If You Are Winning at Church but Not at Home, You are Not Winning



There is **one thing only you can do**—only you can be a husband to your wife and a father to your kids.

The church can get another pastor or preacher. God gave your kids you as their father, so prioritize them.

- Ministry can be easier to do than family, and ministry success can come quickly. But your investment in your family is crucial because they will always be with you.
- I found myself counseling too much and spending too many hours on sermon prep. My time with my family was suffering, or my attention when I was home was not fully my family. So, I started investing in them as if they were a family at church that I was helping (they are a

family at church, my family). This gave me permission to spend the time and attention on them that I wanted to.

- **Make sure your kids know that they are free to be kids.** They are not little pastors, even though in a group setting everyone will ask them to pray, even though they are the Pastor's kids. They are not little versions of you or representatives of you. Give them the freedom to be themselves and simply kids.
- As you schedule meetings and time with church family, schedule in your calendar weekly family time and dates with your wife.
- Make sure to have a Sabbath and protect the Sabbath.
- When you enter your front door of your home, remember that's the most important ministry you're about to do.



5



Distract Yourself

Take up rock climbing.

If you golf, walk, or go to the gym, you are probably listening to a podcast or thinking about your last or next sermon. You need a break from that.

Distract yourself regularly.

One pastor said he took up rock climbing because it is so demanding to concentrate on footwork and not falling that **he cannot think of anything church-related** while climbing.

Pastor Craig Groeschel (Life.Church) began jujitsu after 30 years of pastoring to help him disengage from ministry for a few hours a week. He goes to the gym regularly to work out, but that is also outreach and evangelism ministry. The demands of jujitsu force him to unplug from all ministry, and that is something all pastors regularly need to do.

A healthy distraction a few hours every week is an investment in your ministry and family that will help keep you emotionally and spiritually healthy.



6

Pastor Yourself



Counsel yourself like you counsel others.

If you were counseling someone about lowering their stress level, how would you counsel them?

Take your own advice and make some needed changes.

Jesus counseled: “Love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your **soul** and with all your **strength** and with all your **mind**” (Luke 10:27, NIV).

Use these 4 quadrants for personal evaluation, pastor, to keep a healthy balance in your love for the Lord.

HEART: How is your level of compassion for others? Is your emotional fuse shorter these days? Is your heart not as soft to those struggling as it once was? Those may be signs that something emotionally is out of balance in you.

SOUL: Do you have a time of prayer and Bible devotion that is separate from sermon preparation? Personal Bible reading is for your own spiritual health. Sermon preparation is for others’ spiritual health. Your focus should be on Jesus and not on doctrines. Keep Jesus

personal to you. Strive for a 3-5 mile walk a few times a week. No earbud or podcasts. Just you and Jesus talking. (Note: It takes me 2 miles of walking before I find my mind clears away all the distracting thoughts, and then I am able to be more focused on listening to the Lord.)

STRENGTH: You cannot lead well if you are not fit to lead. Maintaining a healthy body helps your optimism, your attitude, and reduces stress.

MIND: Keep learning. Proverbs 25:2 (ESV) states, “It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings to search things out.” God is like a father who plays hide-n-seek with his creation and delights in His children’s engaging in discovery of His creation. Learn new things every year. Stretch yourself to do something challenging each year. Climb a mountain, run a race, learn a foreign language—do it with a friend or one of your children and enjoy the experience of loving God with your mind.

Pick up a new hobby. I heard a hobby described as something that takes time and costs money. I invest \$25-50/week in Friday afternoon golf with some buddies, and it is fun and a needed distraction from pastoral responsibilities. It brings a healthy balance into my life. And my wife likes it that I am out with other guys and walking for 5 hours and having fun.

You would counsel this advice to others. Now pastor yourself, pastor.



7

Get Some Sleep



It is said that **70% of sanctification is a good night's sleep.**

You will be a better follower of Jesus if you are rested and in a good mood. Being short-tempered with people or lacking empathy can be signs that you are tired.

Most pastors are tired.

Most pastors need a sleeping aid to fall asleep.

Most pastors are out of balance in their home and work rhythms.

A good rule of thumb that has been a slogan since the 1800s is: **8 hours for sleep, 8 hours for work, 8 hours for friends and family.**

Those are curbs to keep you on the road and not crashing.

So, when meetings or sermon preparation start to seem like a chore rather than ministry, you may need more sleep.

A rested pastor is kinder, gentler, a better leader, more creative, more productive, and able to be sustained for long-term, healthy ministry.

It should be no surprise that God wants us to spend 1/7 of our life resting (Sabbath) and created us to sleep 1/3 of our life away.

Our sleep and rest are important to God.
Leverage the power of sleep.



8

The Stressed Out Pastor



Most pastors are stressed out and headed to burnout.

Listen to any podcast about pastors and the common theme is **overwork, stress and emotional breakdown, all while their church is doing great.**

Small church pastors are often digging their own graves. No elder group or board is making you work so much. If you are like me, it is your own self-imposed burden to work 50+ hours a week.

A pastor-friend of mine recently told me he was going into the church office every day and a few evenings a week were home groups, and he was worn out (he was just finishing his first year as pastor).

I asked if the elders were demanding he be in the office? No.

Were there people continually dropping by the church to meet with him?

No. In fact, not many people came to the church office during the week.

Could he sermonize at home?

Yes.

So why was he stressing himself out with a daily commute when no one else was putting these burdens on him?

Not sure.

Pastor, reevaluate your workweek. Impose some new structure that will get rid of things that add stress.

It's cliché to ask us to consider Jesus, but we need to in the work-life balance. Jesus had the same 24 hours that you and I do. But he never seemed stressed, overworked or out of balance. I think we can agree that our ministry is not more important than Jesus'. So balance and pace are essential to the **longevity of the minister and of the ministry**. Just like for Jesus.

If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed...(Ecclesiastes 10:10, NIV)



9

Keep the Sabbath



Do you know of any pastor who keeps a Sabbath?
I don't.

Most pastors have a Monday day off and a “coffee date” with their wives. That needs to happen, but it is not a Sabbath.

After 28 years of church ministry, I am only recently beginning to try to take a Sabbath.

I encourage myself and you to really prioritize what God has prioritized.

Genesis 2:2-3, **before the Fall**, God Himself took a Sabbath. The 7th day of creation, God ceased from his work. Sabbath does not mean rest as in sleep, but to cease from labor.

God's 4th Commandment to Israel was to "remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy...**The Lord blessed the Sabbath and made it holy**" (Exodus 20:8, 11, NIV).

The Sabbath is the only one of the 10 Commandments not repeated in the New Testament, giving us freedom on which day we choose (Romans 14:5). Christians are not bound by Israel's laws. But the principle of the Sabbath is pre-Fall, pre-Law, and we are encouraged to enjoy the blessings of Sabbath today (Colossians 2:16) on the day we choose.

Place yourself in the blessing of God by keeping the principle He has blessed.

The purpose of a Sabbath is not to recover from the past week of work but to refresh you for the next week of work.

So, **how should you take a Sabbath?** This ceasing from work is similar to clocking out on a time card. You cease work.

(Note: Do not impose a Sabbath on anyone else, especially not on your family. Focus on your own Sabbath practice.)

I used to take a 1/2 Sabbath on Sunday after church, then take another 1/2 Sabbath during the week.

I don't recommend that model because it is not effective for what God intended.

God intended an entire day dedicated to "ceasing work." That means no producing (a sermon, a book, a project for church, etc.).

If you are like me, I have to limit my Bible reading on my Sabbath, or I will start producing a sermon.

Anything that you would do during the week for work, cease from that for a day.

It took me a few months to practice and get into the mindset of ceasing work. I had to figure out what I could do on my Sabbath so that I did not feel like I was producing or working. So, give yourself some time to experiment.

Turn your phone off and get outside, and you will have a great Sabbath.

I cut the grass, work in the garden, take a family bike ride, read, play golf, take a nap.

I do not exercise (run, lift weights) because I do those things during the week, and it is more like producing. And I unplug and do not listen to podcasts because those set me into producing-mode.

Your Sabbath day should break the routine of the rest of your week, leaving you refreshed and energized to enter a new week.

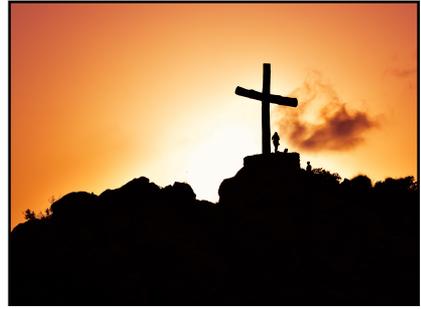
Fight the feeling that you are “wasting” a day. Soon you will see it as an investment into the health and balance of yourself and your family. Your Sabbath will replenish your heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Once you get into a Sabbath routine, you will understand God’s wisdom in establishing this practice, and you will strive to keep and protect this day because it is such a blessing to you and to your family.



10

Protect Your Mornings



Talk with any accomplished leader, and they all have the same morning routines. They protect their mornings.

I'm surprised how many good leaders get up at 4:30 am or 5 am.

They have time with God in varied ways through His Word, prayer conversation, worship music, journaling. Their day is then built on the first spiritual foundation of an active relationship with Jesus.

Your mind works best in the morning before decision fatigue sets in, so that is the time to produce. Do your deep work—sermonize, write a book, create. Those first 2-4 hours of your day will be your most productive.

That means, **no breakfast meetings**. As Andy Stanley says, “To say Yes to something means saying No to something else.”

When your energy and concentration dip, then go have a lunch meeting, but you have protected your peak morning hours.

The Principle of First. First things matter to God:

- God consecrated the **firstborn** (Exodus 3:1-2).
- The church meets on the **first day of the week** (Acts 20:7).
- **First fruits** and tithes is giving God the first of our income (1 Cor. 6:2, Prov. 3:9).
- When Israel went into the Promised Land, all the plunder of Jericho was given to God (Joshua 7) because it was the **first city** of the land. After Jericho, God allowed the Israelites to keep the plunder (Joshua 8:2).
- The **first of the year** sets the trajectory for the rest of the year (personally, for your family, and for the church).

So, what you put in your mind first matters for your spiritual life the rest of the day. **Let God speak to you first thing in the morning. Then, produce.**



11

Cross Pollinate



Gone are the days when people asked about your denomination.

These days, there is **more freedom and expectation** that you spend time with those outside your theological circles. Take a pastor from a different style of church out to lunch and learn his story and how God is working in his life.

This cross-pollination will enrich you as a Christian and church leader and give you empathy for the people in your congregation who come from disparate religious backgrounds.

Join or initiate a once-a-month prayer group with local senior pastors from your community. Share what is happening in each church, and pray for one another. Jesus will bless this unity of the Body of Christ. (Note: Limit it only to Senior Pastors. It will derail if you allow church leaders or elders in.)

When I pastored a small church in Monaco, the only other Protestant church in the country was the British

Anglican Church. The Priest was very liberal, and we disagreed on most of our understanding of Scripture, but we met weekly for coffee. Neither of us changed our theology, but the friendship and learning encouraged us to be better listeners and more humble pastors who appreciated the variety of ways God works in people's lives.



12



Are You Likable?

When you see a person's name on your caller ID, you either want to talk with that person or you don't.

Are you the type of pastor people want to answer a phone call or text from?

Jesus attracted people from all walks of life: prostitutes, political zealots, accountants, fishermen, children, religious elites like some Pharisees who invited Jesus to dinner, even blatant unbelievers.

That is an impressive diversity of community who liked to be around Jesus.

In what ways can you grow likable like Jesus?



Section 2:

The Pastor's

Role

2.1



Resist the Urge to Change Everything Right Away

Professor Aubrey Malphrus taught our pastoral leadership class at DTS and stated, “It will take eight years before you start to change the church to what you want it to be.”

My buddy Darril and I looked at each other and smiled and shook our heads. Not in our church, we thought! Six to nine months and we will be crafting the church according to our greatness.

We each had our hundred-page church strategy with the baseball diamond leadership cycle that Rick Warren started. So, in our seminary-student mind, all we would have to do is show this to the elders and get rolling.

Every new pastor I have met has underestimated how long change takes.

Now, 25 years later, we acknowledge how right Dr. Malphurs was! So, new pastor, go slowly and set a very long expectation for the church culture to change. People have

their castles that they are king and queen of, whether it's finance or parking or children's or snacks. Respect the role these leaders had before you even heard of this church.

Chances are the previous pastor had checked out of leading years ago, and these individuals were keeping the church going by running their little ministries. Appreciate them before you seek to criticize or change.

Or, as Stephen Covey memorably wrote: *Seek to understand before seeking to be understood.*



2.2

Know Their Names



My first class at Dallas Theological Seminary was a large class of 300 taught by the wonderful Dr. Tom Constable. So, day one, there are 300 students in the hallway waiting for the professor. Dr. Constable walks by me and says, “Good morning, Craig. I hope you are excited about starting at DTS.”

I was stunned that he knew my name and could pick me out of 300 people! It made such an impression on me that I asked him after class how he knew me. Dr. Constable said that he printed the ID photos of all of his students and learned their names and faces each semester. The result is so personally meaningful and impactful to me that I have adopted this as I teach at California Baptist University.

The first things you will be inclined to do is to focus on your sermon preparation (the pressure of the next sermon coming in six days is real) or meet with the elders about leadership issues.

Your desire to focus on leadership is natural. But value and give time for these things:

- Spend time with your congregation, not just having them coming to you during your office hours (the majority will not do this).
- Be the shepherd Jesus talked about who went to search for the one wandering sheep.
- Reach out to older members who will not want to bother you. Ask them if you can come over for coffee at their home and hear their story.

Pastors have such bad reputations of only meeting with someone when there is a problem that most people think they are being sent to the Principal's office when you ask someone to have coffee. "What did I do wrong?" they will ask. Or, "Am I in trouble?"

It will take a few years to set a new culture, that you are on their side and just want to live life with them. **Knowing their names is a great start.**



2.3



Your Superpower

Moses asks God a question you will ask: “Who am I to lead God’s people?”

God does not answer his question. Instead, God redirects. “Moses, I will be with you” (Exodus 3:12, NLT).

Remind yourself of this truth. Your ministry is not about you and what you can do for God because of your great abilities. Your ministry is about God. Your superpower is that God will be with you.

Thirty chapters later, after experiencing ministry both without God and with God, Moses gets it right. **God, “your presence among us sets your people and me apart from all the other people on the earth”** (Exodus 33:16, NLT).

Personal time with the Lord, listening to Him through His Word, observing where God is working around you will help keep you dependent on God and not on yourself.

If you want God to speak to you then **don't plug your ears up with earbuds listening to somebody else's voice.** Unplug your ears to hear God's voice.



2.4



Preaching

This is the mountaintop. This is why you got into pastoral ministry: to preach. Here are some preaching tips that I've learned along the way, personally and from others.

- **Speak slowly and pause** for people to be able to reflect on what you are sharing.
- **Preach to the need or question people have** that God's Word is answering in your text. Your people have problems and are wanting God's Word to help them solve those problems.
- **Start your message** by describing a problem people commonly face—at work, at home, in their relationship with God or in their relationship with each other.
 - I started one message describing a time I was golfing with one of my leaders, and he hit a bad shot and in anger threw his club. Then he had to climb into the golf cart with me, his pastor. He

said: “I’m sorry I lost my temper, Pastor. **I am the worst Christian in the world!**” Then I asked the congregation: Have you ever felt like the worst Christian in the world? Maybe it was something insensitive you said, or some repeated thing you do, and you feel like the worst of Christians. The Apostle Paul has a help and hope for you and me in the Book of Romans when we blow it, and we feel like the worst Christian in the world.

- **Take a break from the pulpit.** Agree with your elders on how many Sunday’s you will preach, maybe 40 of the 52 a year. Find out who in your congregation has teaching gifting or experience and work with them as your substitute. Congregations are very forgiving of the occasional Bible teacher who is learning.
 - This is my advice to those who ask me about how to talk with pastoral search committees about balance of preaching time and time away from the pulpit. I suggest 4 weeks a year personal time away from pulpit and 4 weeks away leading mission trips. That may initially sound like a lot of time out of the pulpit, but when you lead your people on mission trips, you are discipling them in more dynamic ways than just the pulpit, and it will breathe life into your congregation. Those four weeks making disciples of all nations are a good investment in your church family outside of the pulpit.

- **Preaching/teaching is a spiritual gift**, but it is also a skill that you should study and work to improve.
 - Work not only on the content of your preaching but also work on the presenting aspect. Watch really good presenters to see how they moderate tone and pitch and when they infuse stories and illustrations,
 - Ask yourself: when did you feel engaged, and what engaged you?
- **Recognize Holidays.** Some pastors are in a preaching series, say on the the Book of James, and they plow right on despite it being Easter or Mother's Day or Father's Day. I consider that a huge disconnect from the congregation. Right after church, the family is taking Mom and Grandma out to lunch to celebrate Mother's Day, and you missed a great opportunity to convey God's loving heart towards moms. Likewise, commercialism has taken over Easter, so that most think of bunnies rather than the resurrection of Jesus. Use that high-attendance Sunday not to continue in James 3, but to share with Christians and non-Christians the glory and hope of Christ's resurrection.
 - I like to leverage Father's Day and Mother's Day as outreach events, a time to do something special for moms or dads, such as flowers, a special meal, a performance by the kids in church.
 - We used to have kids' talent show, and it became one of the highest attended Sundays of

the year. One of our deacons who is great with kids would have the youngest and shyest kids come on stage and make animal sounds as their talent. It was a huge hit with everyone and attracted a lot of grandparents to Mother's Day service. And, it was great fun.

- For Father's Day, our whole church (about 150 people) would go to a member's house near the church and have church service around the pool. We had worship music, and then I would do a special 12-15 minute Father's Day devotional on Biblical Fatherhood, and then we had burgers and BBQ, and the kids got to swim. It became a great outreach event and attracted people who would not enter a church building. And we made that our once-a-year baptism day, so a lot of kids and adults got baptized.
- **Limit the amount of hours you put into preparing a sermon.** Put more hours into praying about it and asking the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom and insights.
 - My buddy Darril puts 10 hours into his sermons. I would marvel that he had such high-quality sermons with 1/3 of the prep-time I had.
 - I usually put 30 hours into most sermons, which puts a huge strain on work/family/personal balance. For my Genesis series, I was doing 50 hours of sermon prep, on top of an already large amount of

counseling. It was not healthy or necessary. I now limit myself to 10 to 15 hours for new sermons. And they are well-received and as good as ones I put more time into by reading extra commentaries to find just one more great point.

- **Almost everyone preaches topically** now because they're able to do short series on a specific point of need in people's lives: how to help your finances, help for a mental crisis, parenting help, etc.
 - I like to teach through books of the Bible verse by verse because that is how they were written. Paul wrote a letter to the Roman Church, not topics.
 - But, topics are helpful for people to absorb and take into their week. So, as I teach through Luke's Gospel, I'll take a chapter and teach the context of the Book, and then teach topically to people's needs through each verse.
- **Anchor your sermons in doctrine** and let people know: this is the doctrine of sin that this verse is explaining; this is the doctrine of Christ; this is doctrine of the Holy Spirit, etc. Then, explain it and give an illustration so that people are grounded by these big rungs and anchors of doctrine.
- If you can't say the **main point of your message in a single sentence**, your audience will never remember it. An example of a memorable, portable (people can carry it into their week) point is: "God uses small churches to

do big missions.” As Dallas Seminary Professor Howard Hendricks used to say, "A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pews."

- **Be specific with your application.** Our preaching profs would have us make a grid, and across the top, we had to write the names of various people in our church. On the left column, we had to write different places a person might be during the week. For example: Steve at dinner with his family. Steve at work. Steve with friends. Jane at dinner with her family. Jane taking her kids to school, etc. Then in each box in the grid write an application.
 - For example: Galatians 6:2 (NIV) states: “Carry each other’s burdens.” How can Steve at dinner with his family carry their burdens? Application: Steve can share (age-appropriate for his kids) something he is struggling with at work and ask his family to pray for him. He can then have them share, and he can pray for his family’s burdens.
 - How can Jane, while she is driving her kids to school, carry their burdens? Application: Jane can share with her kids that she knows one of them has a test that day and is anxious, and she can share how God helps us in our times of being nervous.
- **Don’t crash land your sermon.** You have put a lot of work into your opening and your applications and illustrations. Don’t ruin it by crashing your ending so

that people forget your sermon and just remember the confusion at the end. Have a clear ending that restates your main point and is a call to action for that week; maybe one that recalls the opening illustration so that the listeners subconsciously rethink through the entire sermon again.

- **Don't time-stamp your sermons.** Sermons are now available on the internet for decades. Someone (from any country in the world) may be listening to your sermon ten years after you preach it. Try to make your message time-neutral so it doesn't feel like watching an old black and white movie from a different era, but it is relevant to future listeners.
- **You will be 2nd to online pastors.** Inevitably when I would get down from the pulpit and church would be over, somebody would come up and tell me about the most wonderful and amazing sermon from a megachurch pastor that they had listened to that week. But they would never comment on *my* sermon. Rather than getting frustrated (as I did), be thankful your people are listening to sermons mid-week and can remember what was taught. I have learned that people were connecting with my sermons, but they felt awkward about talking with me about them, so they tended to talk about other pastors' sermons with me.
- **I have found that my theology on secondary issues changes every ten years.** The adage, "You don't learn

until you teach” is true for the Bible. At seminary and Bible college, you digest through the fire hose, and it provides a framework for thinking through the Bible. But you don’t really figure out what you believe specifically until you start teaching verse by verse and chapter by chapter. So be gracious towards other views that are orthodox but different than yours because your own views on non-core issues will tweak about every ten years as you teach through God’s Word.

- **The more deeply you care** about your congregation *out* of the pulpit, the more deeply they will care about what you share *in* the pulpit.



2.5

Be a Shepherd, then a Preacher



I know Jesus told Peter 2x to “feed my sheep” and only 1x to “take care of my sheep” (John 21:15-16), but the adage is true: They won’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.

An online pastor can feed your sheep but cannot take care of them. That is your God-given unique role. And people are longing to know their pastor cares for them and that they are important enough for the pastor’s time and attention.

Be the shepherd of God’s flock that God appointed you to be.



2.6

How to Set the Vision for Your Church



Vision is the path for your church. From the pulpit, Sunday after Sunday, you share: This is our path. This is why we are on the path. This is how we will go down the path.

One of your main roles is to point your elders and your congregation towards your church's goal.

For example, you share: Jesus commanded us to make disciples of all nations. That is our path—to make disciples of Jesus locally and globally. We are on this path because Jesus commanded us.

How will we go down this path? We will partner with solid churches overseas and locally to help them make disciples in their communities through the sharing of the Gospel and Bible teaching.

Remember, **you and your church are a tree in a story about a forest.** That is, your church body is one vital

aspect of the entirety of God's kingdom. Keep people focused on the forest of God's kingdom that God is building and how your congregation can fulfill its vital role in it.



2.7



A Church of Volunteers or of Disciples?

We all need volunteers.

Small and large churches run on Sundays because of faithful volunteers. But, make sure you engage their brains as well as their backs.

Find people who do social media or photography or finance or business management or operations, not just volunteers to move chairs, refresh coffee, and help in children's ministry.

Engage the wisdom of business leaders for help with administration, creativity, finances, giving, managing, etc.

That will help volunteers to use their unique spiritual gifting in a way that engages them and helps you run the church.

Beware of this trap: becoming a church of volunteers.

A metric for assessing volunteers: **Are you a church of volunteers or a church of disciples?**

Most churches treat volunteers as disposable workers. They keep working the volunteers until the volunteers burn out and then find new ones.

Churches do that because it is easier on the staff just to have the same volunteers serve every Sunday rather than invest in discipling them to have a balance of spiritual investment, service, and rest time.

I urge you to ensure your volunteers have an **opportunity regularly to sit in church service, worshipping with their families**, rather than Sunday after Sunday being out in parking lot directing traffic until the sermon starts.

Volunteers will not stop and take a break. You have to tell them to take a break.

Here's the danger: If you do not impose a break for the volunteers, you train those volunteers to equate Sunday, time with the body of Christ and union of Christ, as service. So, if they are not serving on a Sunday, they do not feel that they are being good Christians.

In one church, I had a woman who volunteered every Sunday, and it took her out of the church service every Sunday. She was a great volunteer, and her ministry served the whole church body every Sunday. But, her husband sat alone in the church service. Church fellowship and worship of Jesus was replaced by her serving. It was unhealthy. I had to step in and tell her she needed a three-month full break, and then she could return but only volunteer two Sundays a month. It was hard, but she eventually saw the wisdom in this and appreciated my stepping in to help her get balance.

Be a church of disciples and worshippers, not a church of volunteers.



2.8



How to Choose the Right Children’s Director (*and other staff*)

The key to a good children’s minister is **administration gifting over personality.**

Most people think the best children’s minister is the one who most connects with the kids. It’s natural to think that.

But the person you want leading the children’s ministry is one who has a heart for children but is also gifted administratively.

Parents want to know that their kids are safe and that they will learn about the Bible and get out on time. Those aspects take administration, not a bubbly personality that kids love.

In fact, **all ministry leaders should be ones with strong administrative gifts.** Whether they’re volunteers or paid staff, if you hire a secretary, a children’s ministry

leader, men's ministry or women's ministry, leaders who are administratively gifted will provide the organized framework for a ministry to flourish. A well-organized program will then attract the extroverts for children's ministry or the Bible teachers for men's and women's ministry.

For example: Our children's minister earned his living as a tile setter. But he was incredibly organized and loved to run events for families. Everything was prepared well, from food, games, equipment, supplies, and volunteers. The events ran as planned, and people had a great time.

Families trusted our children's ministry because they had confidence in how the ministry was being run.

And volunteers who loved to work with kids got to focus their energy on loving kids because the structure for children's ministry was solid.



2.9



Starve the Sacred Cow (*How to End Ineffective Ministries and Outdated Values*)

Several elderly ladies and a few gentlemen were so happy the one Sunday I decided to wear a dress shirt and tie to church, about 2 months after starting. One said to me: **Now you look like a pastor!**

Sacred cows are values your congregation holds as sacred, but they are really just their opinions. Sacred cows can be **dress codes** (pastors wear ties, not untucked California-style, short sleeve, button-down shirts) or **ministries** (but John has *always* led Men's ministry!) or **worship styles** (we must have a hymn in the worship set).

When you start your pastorate at the church, you will be amazed at how many little things your people consider "holy" and untouchable. It could be having an organ as part of worship or that 82-year-old Betsy should continue to be the church secretary.

Pastor, your first instinct will be to shoot those cows and start fresh.

But don't.

Don't shoot the sacred cows.

Everyone remembers the person who shot the cow. And not in a good way.

But **nobody remembers** the person who **starved the cow**. And that is good. So just forget about the sacred cow; don't fight it. Don't give it attention, and just starve it until it goes away, and it will not be a negative against you.

Behind the scenes, start moving on to new initiatives as God leads you. When a new event involving men is raised, you suggest a new person to lead it as a way of discipling and evaluating new leaders.

So, have grace towards people's sacred cows, but don't kill them! Let them starve.



2.10

One Thing You Must Do: *Lead Short-Term Mission Trips*



Jesus said: Go and **be a disciple** of all nations (Matthew 28:18).

No, Jesus said, Go and **make disciples** of all nations.

Every good thing that happened at our church was the result of overseas short-term missions.

The most important discipleship tool in your pastoral toolbox is short term mission trips (not your sermon). These trips keep your church body worked out and spiritually strong and healthy.

Pastor, you go with your people on these trips. You lead or co-lead or contact a mission agency to lead the trip. Pray as a church about where in the world God wants to send you. Follow the model of Acts 1:8 and engage in making

disciples locally, regionally and globally. **But the greatest impact on your flock will be overseas.**

Here's a sampling of how these overseas short-term mission trips will impact your church:

- **Prayer.** People going overseas and those staying and giving will pray for God's people and God's kingdom in new, vibrant ways.
- **Generosity.** Donations for the team and ministry overseas will come from unexpected areas as your people are spurred towards generosity to God's kingdom.
- **Spiritual gifting.** The Holy Spirit will gift or expose the gifts of people to serve the team in a variety of needed ways.
- **Bible study.** The Bible comes alive as people anticipate engaging in making disciples of all nations and living out the Book of Acts.
- **Sharing God's heart for the world.** Acts 17:27 states that God created the nations "so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him" (NIV). God loves his world so much he sent His Son to die for the world. We share God's heart when we participate in God's work of salvation and the discipleship of the nations.
- **Breaking the grip of spending on self.** Americans give a lot of money to Christian ministry, but we spend more on Halloween costumes for our pets each year than on getting the Gospel to the least reached in this world. Short-term mission trips reorient spending from self to God's Kingdom.
- **Gratitude.** Americans are disproportionately wealthy compared to the rest of the world. Going to see how

others live and in what conditions will help your people well up with gratitude to God for the peace and prosperity of our nation.

- **Supernatural unity.** When you lock arms in ministry with someone from another country under the name of Jesus, the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17:23 is answered: that as the Church is one, we are brought to complete unity.

- **People will be saved.** Sharing the Gospel overseas is the Apostle Paul's answer to how people will be saved (Romans 10:15): how can they preach (and be heard and saved) unless they are sent? Sending your church on mission trips engages you in God's divine method of redemption.

- **Exaltation of God.** There are 120 Old Testament references to the nations worshipping God, and 80 New Testament references to the nations worshipping Jesus. Your short term mission trip allows you to be part of the truth of Psalm 46:10, where God states, "I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth" (NIV).

- **Share God's Missionary Heart.** God is the greatest missionary. Revelation 15:4, "All nations will come and worship before you GOD."

- **Encouragement.** As a small church, being part of God's global missions activity is hugely encouraging to your people. You're not just a mustard seed in a small community; you are part of what God is doing worldwide. As Jonathan states in 1 Samuel 14:6: "Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few."

- **Faith grows.** There is a dependency on God in faith as your people step out into the spiritual battle against spiritual forces in other cultures. Your people's faith in the Lord will grow.
- **Spiritual Maturity.** Those who return from experiencing God overseas return with a vibrancy to their faith and a new willingness to volunteer and serve in your church. These missionaries become your ministry leaders.



2.11



Elders

Work with the elders you have, not the elders you wish you had. Don't wait for super-elders; appreciate and use the gifting of the men God has given you.

- **Small is better.** For a church of 50-150, 2 elders (plus you) is plenty and keeps decisions quick and meetings short and effective.
- **Ask your elders for PRE-FORGIVENESS.** You will make mistakes, so it's good to know that you are pre-forgiven. Learn from those errors and do not repeat. Give your elders pre-forgiveness, too.
- **Invite construction guys to be elders.** After several bad experiences with entrepreneurial businessmen on my elder board (this may be unfair, but it has been my experience that they tend to focus on finances over the spiritual), I have resolved not to have any more.

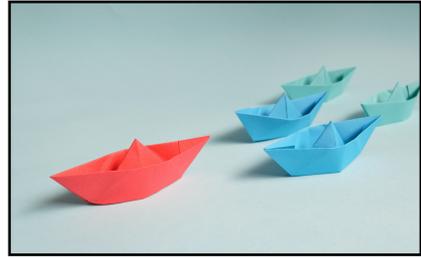
Teachers, military and guys who work with their hands tend to be solid spiritual helpers as church leaders.

- **Pray with your elders** before church and during meetings and anytime else (Acts 6:4).
- **Lead the elder meetings.** You will find that your elders have a heart for the church, but their jobs and families occupy much of their time and thinking. You can focus more time on the church, so set the agenda and lead the meetings.
- **Limit the terms of elders to 2 or 3 years.** Then, mandate a **one-year time off** and then an option to return to the elder board as the board needs. This has been a winning strategy that keeps a fresh energy to the board. And, it keeps the elder board from being or appearing to be an exclusive clique who seem like ancient Roman Catholic Clergy disengaged from the laity.
 - Yes, it means you have to reinvest in a new group of men regularly, but the benefits far outweigh this issue.
 - And, elders get worn out and need a break. Many wives of elders have thanked me for limiting the terms to 2 years so they can have their husbands “back.”



2.12

Develop Leaders



If there are no seminaries or Bible colleges around to supply you with interns, you must develop your own leaders.

You may look at your church's crop of men and despair of potential leaders, but don't.

Leaders come in all shapes and sizes. Jesus took fishermen with varied personalities and developed them into church leaders. God saw potential leadership in teenage David. Prayerfully see the potential in the men God has positioned in your church body. And look to younger men to mentor into future leaders.

Take 12 months and develop leaders.

When inviting guys to be part of your leadership group, let them know that you see potential in them and would like to meet with them monthly to all grow as leaders (even you can grow as a leader).

Incorporate a variety of aspects of leadership into your meetings, not merely book study: study God's Word for

how it applies to your day, pray together, discuss leadership topics, serve as a leader over a church event, reflect on leadership podcasts, help one another lead in the home (1 Timothy 3:5), etc.

Come up with a diverse list of projects that require a leader, and let each one in the group head a project. Evaluate his leadership and help him develop as a leader. Projects could be a church prayer group, or community service project, church clean up day, or short term mission trip. Have potential leaders serve in a variety of ministries in the church during the year so that they experience various aspects of church ministry more comprehensively.



Section 3:

The Small

Church

3.1



The *Secret* to Small Church Growth

Focus on families.

If you focus on families and kids, you will grow numerically (then you can grow in depth spiritually). In general, parents want their kids to have church and faith even if they don't.

The key to growing a little church is families because families attract other families. And they come with numbers, so instead of a single person or an elderly couple, you may have parents with teens kids, and now your church has grown by 5 or 6 people. And, like a good movie, word of mouth will spread about your church to other families.

Here are some ideas of attracting (outreach) families in your community:

- **Host a homeschool.** At Rainbow Community Church, we had the opportunity to host a homeschool co-op.

Education buildings are rare to find for homeschool, so you are helping them by offering your building. And a school is a great way to get families to your church. We built little school rooms for the homeschool to use mid-week, and we used them for Sunday school classes on Sundays. **Win-Win.**

- **Host fun community events aimed at families.** We rented a large blow up movie screen and a projector, and we showed family-fun movies out back on our church lawn, with popcorn and hotdogs for sale (mission trip fundraiser). People brought blankets and chairs, and the community got to see who we were in a non-Sunday church setting. These events really boosted awareness of our church because it was an easy event for church people to invite others to. Plus, everybody's looking for something fun and safe to do **with their kids** on a Friday night.
- When it got colder, we did **indoor movie nights** and kids could wear their PJs and bring pillows and watch a family movie. This became so popular, with church kids inviting friends, that we would have as many people in church on our Friday night movie night as on Sunday morning. (Note: This was not "drop your kids off for us to babysit" but a family event.)



3.2



The Right Metrics to Measure the Health of Your Church

We all want a big church.

But podcasts like *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill* (Christianity Today) should give us all pause, no matter if you are a small church or megachurch.

If, as they say, “butts in the seats” is your main metric of success and health, then you have a problem because you and Jesus are not aligned. You have the wrong metric, or at least an incomplete one.

What was Jesus’ metric for His Church?

It was not, the bigger you grow the healthier you are. Jesus measure was: make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey all I have commanded (Matthew 28:19-20).

Are you making disciples? A fine model of disciple making is the Robert Coleman class, *Masterplan of Evangelism*. The title is deceptive because it is a book about discipleship. In brief:

1. Jesus **showed** his disciples how to do ministry (Jesus healed. The disciples watched).
2. Then Jesus did ministry **with** his disciples (all participated in the feeding of the 5,000).
3. Then Jesus **watched/oversaw** while the disciples did ministry (Luke 10, sending out of the 70, and then they returned to Jesus and there was evaluation).
4. Lastly, Jesus **left** (ascended), and the disciples then did ministry without Jesus physically with them (Book of Acts).

The Apostle Paul's metric for the maturity (spiritual health) of a local church body is this: **to equip God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature** (Ephesians 4:12-13, NIV).

Making disciples for a local church is bringing Christians into unity in what we believe and experientially know about Jesus. That is the foundation for Christians to "become mature" so that their life looks like Jesus'. That is a good metric to strive for.

Pastor Chris Hodges (Church of the Highlands) notes that they only measure four things: get them saved, get them healed, get them trained, get them mobilized. Those are all quantifiable, measurable metrics.



3.3



The Church Should Model Generosity

We want our people to be generous, so model it as a church. Give the first 10% that you receive away to strategic missions locally, regionally, globally (Acts 1:8).

As you show yourself faithful and strategic in participating in God's Kingdom, God will provide the seed you need.

2 Corinthians 10:10 (NLT): *For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer...*



3.4



Find Your Niche As a Small Church

Don't wear Saul's armor (1 Samuel 17:38-40).

Don't try and be a preacher like a popular megachurch leader or like somebody else in your area. Be authentic to the person and leader God has created you to be.

Do you know, pastor, you can do things the online pastor cannot.

- **You can uniquely minister to your community.**

What is your church's niche in your community? Perhaps you are located next to the local middle school or retirement community. Use your geographic closeness to help and bless and serve your neighbor in the name of Christ.

- **Jesus has made you pastor of His local church.**

What is God doing in your heart and life **at this season**, and how can you lead your church towards that unique emphasis?



Remember Pastor, **Jesus is building His Church.**

And his main method is for 90% of churches worldwide to be under 100 in size. You are part of a fellowship of small church pastors around the world.

You're a small church so embrace Jesus' model of building His church.

Be the best healthy small church you can be.

And enjoy it.





About the Author

Craig Poston is the happy husband of Carol and father of 5 sweet daughters he enjoys hanging out with. Craig is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary and has a Ph.D. in English Literature. With Rob Foster and Joe Cardamone, he started Global Church Ministries in 2007 to assist churches and individuals to make disciples of all nations, emphasizing pastor training, evangelism, and orphan, widow, and missionary care.