

# 5 Arenas of Pastoral Leadership

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For about a decade and a half of my life as a pastor, I spent a lot of time focusing on being a better church leader. I read books and articles about vision, about church growth methodologies, and about leadership in hopes that I could perform my way into success the way I thought success should be defined.

All that time, I experienced moderate growth. The churches I led experienced moderate growth as well. So I felt *okay*.

But in the current season of my life, *okay* hasn't satisfied me, and I don't think it was ever supposed to do so.

I've learned much in the current season of my life about what real leadership looks like. In fact, I've still got a long way to go. One of the big truths to hit me along the way is that there are multiple arenas in which I'm called to lead, and my commitment to intentionality in each one affects how effective I am in the others.

While you tweak this list to fit your own life and context, I've come to the conclusion there are five arenas in which God has called me to lead with excellence.

## 1. I need to lead *myself* well.

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I'm starting with self-leadership partly because in seasons of mediocrity, this arena is usually our last priority. We comfort ourselves with the thought that we're doing okay professionally and that *self* really isn't that important anyway.

What we fail to understand is the difference between *servicing* self and *leading* self.

Jesus is the ultimate model in serving *others* before serving self. And I think he's also the ultimate model of effective self-leadership.

What exactly do I mean by *self-leadership*? I define it this way...

***Self-leadership is intentionally directing my mind, soul, and body day in and day out to choose the right affections, attitudes, and actions.***

If I don't lead myself well, I'll coast along on autopilot, living a reactionary lifestyle.

- When money gets tight, I'll scramble to do something about it. But when I'm leading myself well, I'm taking control of my finances, doing the books, creating the budget, putting money aside ahead of time for savings, and determining how to give in advance.
- When I'm stressed, I'll withdraw from the tasks I need to accomplish. But when I'm leading myself well, I make a list of what needs to be done and I get to work on it.
- When I feel distant from God, I'll stay in retreat mode to avoid conviction. But when I'm leading myself well, I get up in the morning and open my Bible, whatever book I'm currently reading, and I pray through my prayer list.

I don't believe we can lead a perfect life in our own will power. But I do believe that when we are empowered by the Spirit of God, we can make wise, healthy choices on a daily basis that align our lives with his will.

Self-leadership is simply being intentional about tuning in and doing the next right thing.

## 2. I need to lead my *family* well.

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I still believe that for pastors, family should come before ministry.

I once went on a mission trip to train pastors in another culture where this value system was flipped. They had a core belief that the pastor's family should sacrifice their time with Mom and (more often) Dad for the sake of the church. And in the wives' track of that conference, women wept because of their loneliness, some of them expressing they were inches from giving up entirely.

My wife needs me to love her, to tune into *her* life rather than focusing primarily on all of my own concerns, and to date her daily.

My kids need me to look them in the eyes every day and remind them that they are loved and cherished and that I'm proud of them.

My family needs me to be present, to be persistent in my love for them, and to create bonds and experiences during our desperately short time together on this planet.

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By the way, if you want to know how well you're doing in this area, check out [The Ziglar Family Assessment](#), which uses Zig Ziglar's Wheel of Family Life as a tool to help you know where to grow.

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### 3. I need to lead my *circle of influence* well.

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Everyone has one. It can include extended family, church staff or co-workers, friends with whom we hang out, or the people who listen to our sermons or read our books and blog posts.

Whatever your circle of influence looks like, you get to lead in this arena. You get to shape values, offer encouragement, inspire, inform, and build bridges.

My pastor, Rick Warren, used to teach us that, as church staff members, we had three big ministries:

- We each had a ministry to lost people who needed Jesus.
- We had a ministry within the church to which we were assigned according to our giftings.
- And we had a ministry to our peers in similar positions elsewhere in the kingdom.

I was always thankful for his urging us to serve our peers. It made me want to do two things – 1.) expand my influence, and 2.) *be led* by others.

In other words, it's not just about me influencing others. It's also about intentionally *being* influenced by peers and mentors because I am *in* the circle of influence that others have to steward.

### 4. I need to lead my *church* well.

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A lot of people who are members of churches probably believe that this should be nearer the top of the list. But believers who are seasoned in the faith understand that they are far better off when their pastor is motivated to lead self, family, and peers well, too.

I tend to think that this is first in our minds, by default, so it's appropriate to point it out fourth in my list.

When it comes to my church life, as a Lead Pastor, I feel a calling to elevate each and every staff member and to encourage each and every church member.

One of my heroes in the faith, W. A. Criswell, wrote [Criswell's Guidebook for Pastors](#), and he defined the role of a pastor as being primarily two things: 1.) study the Word to feed the flock,

and 2.) lead the staff.

Pastor Rick Warren says the pastor's role boils down to two simple words: *lead* and *feed*.

So it's essential that I grow continually as a leader for the good of our staff and for the good of the flock. And the very best kind of leadership for pastors is *shepherd* leadership in which we guide, protect, and feed the flock well.

## 5. I need to lead my *business* well.

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Plenty of pastors don't have a side gig, and a lot of us were even trained to believe that any side interest is simply a distraction from our "true calling."

I've come to disagree with this line of thinking, at least in our modern context. There's nothing at all wrong with focusing entirely on pastoring the local church, but tentmaking doesn't have to be thought of as a last resort, "have to" activity for bivocational pastors *until* their churches can pay them full time.

It can actually be a regular and enriching aspect of a local church leader's ministry. I've written before about the value of having entrepreneurially-minded pastors.

Further, a lot of pastors *do* have a side business. They just don't think of *writing* or *blogging* or building a *radio ministry* as a business.

Since 2010, I've had the privilege of working with the team over at Pastors.com and more recently, Purpose Driven. I've gotten to network with pastors all over the world, edit training material from faithful leaders, and stay fully informed of the latest thinking among evangelical leaders about the church.

I've also gotten to write a book, develop a blog, and do some design and consulting work that has further enriched me, educated me, and supported my family. I coach a few leaders and am an avid student of digital marketing as well.

All of that, and more, falls under my "business." And I need to lead it well. So while I'm reading books and attending conferences about theology, preaching, and church leadership, I'm also reading books and getting educated in the area of writing, marketing, business, and finance.

It's my outlet and my hobby, but it's more than a hobby for me. It's a source of personal growth.

If you're a pastor serving in a position for which you were "hired" with stipulations that you limit side interests, respect that. But my hope is that more and more churches come to understand the underestimated value of having a pastor who desires an ever-expanding influence in the world.

Most of the most successful leaders from whom I've learned have had multiple professional priorities while managing to keep the main thing the main thing.

Here's the bottom line... Happy families, growing churches, and successful businesses are led

by leaders who are committed to getting **better** at leadership.

As John Maxwell puts it, if you're the leader, you're the lid, and you can't lead anyone beyond where you are personally. You can watch people stagnate or leave for greener pastures, OR... **you can grow.**

I choose the latter option!