

Pastoral Visitations

by James Jennings

This sermon emphasizes the importance of systematic and formal pastoral visitations, drawing inspiration from Acts 20 and the example of the Denton church. The speaker highlights the need for elders to pay careful attention to the flock, know their condition, and shepherd them with love and diligence. Challenges, hindrances, and practical tips for effective pastoral visits are discussed, urging the congregation to be open, prepare questions, and prioritize spiritual assessment. The ultimate goal is to faithfully shepherd the church, meet individual needs, and honor God through pastoral care.

Scripture: Acts 20:28, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:2, Proverbs 27:23, Hebrews 13:7

Description

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Transcript

Acts 20, verse 17, Now from Miletus he's sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church." Elders, pastors, same thing. "...To come to him." So you could say he's going to have an elders' meeting. Pastors' meeting.

Pastors' conference. And he goes on in verse 18, "...When they came to him, he said, You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time, from the first day that I set foot in Asia." So Paul was very consistent in his life. "...Serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews.

How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable and teaching you in public and from house to house." So Paul would go in people's houses. You could say have a pastoral visit. Doing some teaching in that context.

In a house. House to house. Different people's houses.

And he says what he was testifying of. But look, verse 28. Look what he tells them.

"...Pay careful attention to yourselves." So watch your own life. Those who are church leaders. And then he says this, "...Pay careful attention to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care, to pastor, to shepherd the church of God, which God obtained with His own blood." The blood of His Son.

What a thing. Pay careful attention. Does he say pay attention? Careful attention to how much of the flock? All.

And so I want to share this morning a burden that's been on my mind, it's been on Craig's and Tim's mind, and I want to talk through a message on pastoral visitations. This is something that we're desiring in a more formal way to be far more systematic in doing with the brethren in the church. And that's what I want to speak to you about.

So in some ways, this is kind of a follow-up sermon to what Tim shared last week about not neglecting the flock. And after that Sunday, I've already had different things happening in my life, different things I was hearing from people that were making me think about systematic pastoral visits. But then I thought, it's right for us to call the church to not neglect the meetings.

Right? That was right there in Hebrews 10. At the same time, we're always looking in the mirror at ourselves asking what might we be neglecting? Because if we're calling the church don't neglect gathering together, what might be areas that we are neglecting? And this is one that came to my mind. As I've heard from different people, different things, this is an area that we desire greatly to excel still more in.

To prioritize more in this area of house-to-house pastoral visits with a greater consistency. And so I first want to kind of explain how we got here, and more specifically, how I got here. Four things have gotten me to this point of having a great burden that when I read, pay careful attention to all the flock, or as it says in Proverbs 27, 23, you don't need to turn there, know well the condition of your flocks and give attention to your herds.

Now that was an actual flock. But that's a picture. What the pastors are seeking to do.

Know well the condition of each and every one of you who are a member in this body. So, four things. The first thing that has really convicted me should be obvious.

The Bible. Right? The Bible has really convicted me. Hebrews 13.

We know this text so well. Hebrews 13, 17. It talks about obeying your leaders, but listen to this.

Why do that? They are keeping watch over your souls. We're going to look at that in a second. As those who will have to give an account.

Keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. It's difficult to know the condition of everyone in the flock without doing house-to-house pastoral visits. Right? It's just difficult.

Especially as the church grows. The spiritual depth of conversations here on Sunday with different people is going to be too short. You need more time.

You need a setting where there's a sense of being open, honest, transparent, unloading your burdens. The second thing. So the first, the Bible.

Hebrews 13, Acts 20. These are convicting passages. The second thing that convicted me is Mack Tomlinson and the pastors in Denton.

Who here remembers what was shared maybe four years ago about what the pastors up there were doing? Does anyone remember maybe four years ago? Yeah. The four pastors in that church had split the whole church up into four lists with households. Meaning, a single would make a household and then a family would be a household.

They divided it up into four individual lists. And they would visit everyone on that list. How often? Once a year? Once a month.

And then they would rotate that list so each month, you'd be getting a different one of the pastors in your house, so each one of the pastors would know well the condition of the members in the flock. You weren't just being around one of the shepherds, you'd be around all of them. And so we've mentioned this.

And pastoral visitations have always been going on in the life of this church. It's never not been happening. What it hasn't been like with the Denton church is something more systematic and more formal.

Now, in Denton, their church has grown. They have five pastors and they visit everyone in the church every two months. Two months.

And you know what? Max says that is one of the greatest, if not the greatest thing they're doing for that body. And they get that type of feedback. So three weeks ago, Tim and Ruby had just got back from the cruise.

And you know what the first thing Tim did when he got back from the cruise? He had a counseling pastoral visit the night he got back from the cruise. So he couldn't make it over. So it was Craig and I in my living room with Mack Tomlinson.

And here, we've known about the Denton church, but their Mack is just expressing all of these things, and Craig and I are asking him questions, and you just feel like you're shrinking. You're shrinking. And it's like, Lord, we want something more like this.

More like this. A third thing that has convicted me in this area of pastoral visitations has been different things I've heard from some of you all, or different situations. I heard from someone else, they told me how they heard different members who were saying they felt like they were neglected by the elders.

And I'm not going to stand here and say that there isn't any type of neglect. We feel overwhelmed in many different areas. We don't want that to be the case.

Another thing that happened in the last couple of weeks, two different families, we were around, they asked me, when are you guys going to start doing pastoral visitations again? So they asked that. How many of you, if I had you over, would you have asked that? Anyone else? A couple? Another thing I was made aware of from someone else that there are some in the church who had problems we didn't even know about and they were going to outside counseling. Didn't even know.

Find out they're meeting with people outside the church for counseling. Not that we might not recommend some outside counseling in some situation, but it obviously makes you ask, why weren't we made aware

of that? I mean, we're to know the condition of our flock. We're going to give an account for their souls.

What led to this? Where we didn't know about this And we hear about this third hand, second hand. A fourth thing that convicted me was something that was even brought up in Jeff Peterson's Q&A. You hear about ministries like the prison ministry or writing emails through I'll Be Honest and these different things that are outside of the church.

And brethren, we never want it to be that those things take the place of any internal needs in the church. I never want to sit at my computer and be counseling someone through the internet when there's someone in the church who needs counseling. You get what I'm saying? Because you guys are the flock we're going to give an account for.

It's not all the people on the internet. It's not all the people at the prison. Those type of ministries are not the prime thing.

So I've been convicted of that my own life. How am I using time? I try to do everything I do on I'll Be Honest during the day when there's no one to meet with. And if I'm not preaching that Sunday, I don't need to be studying necessarily for a sermon.

And I'm pouring my time into the internet type of things. But the worst thing that could happen is for someone in the church to think, well, James is so busy doing all of that, he doesn't have time for my needs. Because that's wrong.

Shouldn't be that. You shouldn't think that about any of us. So, those were the four things.

The Bible convicted me. Mack Tomlinson and the example of the pastors in Denton. Some comments that I've heard from some of you all.

And then just this whole thing that was brought up in Jeff Peterson's Q&A. You know, if Lord willing, this vote is above the percentage that Jeff desires, this evening at 8 p.m. and we're ordaining him in a few weeks, I can guarantee you this, and I talked to Jeff before I got up here, his heart is for the church. It's not going to be Jeff is going to be going off to the prisons and there's needs here.

We need pastors shepherding the flock here. That's what we're seeking to do. And we want to do it better.

We want to correct areas that we might be falling short in. So, someone could say, well, you're off to a bad start. Tim's gone this week and Craig's gone.

Remember, what did Tim share a couple weeks ago before the meeting about Romania? You remember that? What do you think was at the root of those comments? And he probably defined what was at the root of it. We don't want to neglect the church. Tim doesn't want to go to Romania and pour into people there if there are needs here, because you all are the priority.

You all are the ones we're going to give an account for. To God. An account to God.

Craig, if you were in our elders' meeting months ago, Craig was wrestling with whether or not to go to this primitive Baptist church and preach. And you know what Craig said? He said even though he wouldn't be preaching this Sunday in the rotation, he knew if he takes that opportunity, he'll miss out on a couple conversations during and after the meeting. And he said, is that worth it? Is it worth me to be in temple and miss those conversations or to be here? So my point is that our desires, we believe are righteous desires.

We desire these things. The desire is not absent. It's not been absent.

More of it is just the how. How to go about accomplishing some of these things. Richard Baxter said this, Pastors are seeking to do our best for all in the universal church, but we must allow others no more than it can spare of our own time and health.

Meaning, we want to do the best we can for the whole universal church, but not at the neglect of this local body of believers who the Holy Spirit who has made us overseers, who we are to pay attention to and know the condition of every single member on that members list. And we're going to give an account to God for that on judgment day. So I want to look now, Hebrews 13.

Turn there. Hebrews 13. Pastoral visits are essential in us fulfilling our overall call.

And I just want to think for a moment again about this call because it's weighty. Hebrews 13.17, it's just full of weight. You can say so full of it that in v. 18, Paul asked for prayer.

Or not Paul, the writer of Hebrews asked for prayer. Pray for us. This type of thing calls you to ask for prayer.

But just think first of this phrase, they are keeping watch over your souls. Keeping watch. Keeping watch.

I looked up that word. The idea is to be sleepless. To be sleepless.

To exercise constant vigilance over something. A shepherd and the sheep. To keep watch is to be in a state untouched by any slumber or beclouding influences.

One that is guarded against the advances of drowsiness or becoming bewildered. That's what it is to keep watch. I was reading, there's this one pastor, Mr. Cecil, hundreds of years ago.

And he felt like something was getting in the way of his duty to his sheep. You know what that something was? He was a very, very good violin player. You know what he did to his violin? He cut the strings and he never played it again.

Because he felt like it was consuming time that should have gone elsewhere. Keep watch. Constant vigilance over something.

Acts 20, careful attention to yourself. 1 Peter 5, shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight. When you think about actual shepherds, it says in Luke, shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night.

Mention Proverbs 27.3. Know well the condition of your flock. Or in the KJV, be diligent to know. Be diligent.

God calls us to be diligently doing whatever we can to know your condition of your soul. Because as Ezekiel 6 says, we're to seek out the lost, bring back the strayed, bind up the injured, and strengthen the weak. So keeping watch.

This being sleepless. Guarding against drowsiness or bewilderment. The second thing here is we're to keep watch over what? Over your souls.

What's the most valuable possession you've got? If you want to call it a possession? It's your soul. But what's the one thing you don't want to lose? Your soul. What is the soul? It's your spirit, your inner man.

It's the core of your being. It's you. What is the value of your soul? Well, we read in Mark 8, what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? And then he says this, for what can a man give in return for his soul? Your soul is so valuable that if you gained the whole world, you couldn't swap that for your soul.

And here God has appointed us to oversee you all. That's more important than overseeing 200 planets and 200 worlds. It's waiting.

To keep watch over your soul. Here God the Father has sent His only Son to obtain you all with the blood of His Son shed on that cross. And you are His treasure.

And He raises up some of us to oversee the others and to seek to get all of us to the end. And we're going to give an account to Him. So, what is this longevity of your soul? It's never going to die.

You don't want to lose your soul. It's never going to die. And we're watching over your soul that you do not lose it.

1 Timothy 4.16 Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing, you will save both yourself and your hearers. You hear that? Save both yourself and your hearers.

God's calling us to do that. We're watching over your soul, the most valuable thing you have that will last for all of an eternity, that you not lose it. And we're looking to those who have not yet lost their life and surrendered to Christ to do that.

To come to Him. And think, why do we need to keep watch? Well, there's false teachers. Titus 1 says there's people they must be silenced since they're upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

Why should we watch? There's wolves. Where do they come from? Just out there? Or in here? That's what Acts 20 says. They come from inside, not just outside.

If we don't know the condition of an individual, what if they're hearing something from someone even in our own body? That's wrong. We've got to know that. We've got to correct that.

Why are we keeping watch? Because there's a devil who prowls around like a roaring lion seeking to whom he may devour. Devour with lies. Devour with slander.

Devour with discouragement. Whatever it may be. Why are we keeping watch? Because sin.

Because some of your hearts might be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin as Hebrews 3.13 says. And we want to know who in this church right now has a present condition of a heart that's being hardened by sin. We want to know who that person is.

Those people that we can help. That they not get plucked off, eaten by a wolf. That they not just grow hardened and disappear without our notice.

Even the sermon last week that Tim gave is seeking to exercise and watch over your soul. Because as we see people neglecting the meetings and having that not as a priority, that's concerning about where they're at spiritually. So that sermon in itself from the pulpit was given to watch over your soul.

We have this members list and we look at those names. I was looking through the whole list the other day and just thinking, is this person discouraged in any way? Does this person have undelt sin going on in their life in any way? How is this person's marriage? It appears okay Sunday morning when they're here, but what's really going on? And it's not like I'm going to walk down the aisle to that couple in this setting and that necessarily would be the most appropriate place to open up with all those questions. It would be a lot better if they were in my house or I was in theirs and we were sitting across from each other with an expectation we're going to have an honest conversation.

We want to know what is your condition? What burdens do you have? What imbalanced teaching has someone in the church read from a book or heard on the Internet that is damaging you spiritually? We want to know that. Is that happening? We want to know what areas of parenting is certain people overwhelmed by and they need counsel on. We look at your names.

We might even have our wives look at your Facebook posts. And we want to know, why are they posting what they're posting? Does this indicate something? Does it not? What's going on? What is their true condition? And Hebrews 13 says we're doing this as those who will have to give an account. All believers give an account.

But the pastors in the church, we're going to give a lot more serious account to God. And you see that right there. And we're overseeing those that Acts 20 says He obtained with His own blood.

We are to give an account to the protection of the condition of those to whom the Father paid the price of His Son's own blood to secure. And the Holy Spirit, it said in Acts, has made you overseers. We didn't do this.

Even with Jeff, we're praying, Lord, are You doing this? And everything to this point, it seems God is doing this. Not GCC. Not us.

But the Holy Spirit is making Him another one of the overseers of this church. So what am I going to say to God on that day? I lack time? I've spent too much time playing my violin? What's it going to be? I did too many outside the church things? We all as individuals are always wrestling with that. We don't want these things in the way.

Even recently, we planted a garden 25 feet by 15 feet. We bought all these plants and seeds and we planted it. And you know what? I want these plants to survive, so you know what I did? I bought PVC and I made an irrigation system for it.

Because I want them to survive. Because I know their condition. They're going to be toast if they're not getting water when the sun starts cooking.

Well, you know what happened days later after that garden? What happened? We got freezing temperatures. I knew the condition of these little plants that I just planted. Their roots have not gone deep.

Do you think I just left them out there to die? No, I started researching. What do I do to cover them? Hay is too expensive, they say. So I didn't do the hay.

And then I found some insulate tarp that was worth the investment. We bought that. We covered the plants.

Why? I knew their condition. I was watching over them by the night. And that's what we're seeking to do for you all.

As the body grows, can it become more difficult? Yes. But it being difficult is obvious. It's going to be difficult.

It's going to be hard. Even what the brethren are doing in Denton is not easy. I called Mack the other day.

I wanted to ask him some more questions. And he said, well, brother, I need to go schedule some of these meetings that I'm behind on. Charles Bridges said, the gardener does not rest when he has committed his seed to the earth.

He watches its growth with constant anxiety and toils incessantly for its preservation from dangers until he has safely gathered his fruit. We're seeking to do that for you all until we've presented you to the Lord. We've brought you to the end.

We've saved both ourselves and you, the hearers, through preaching, through shepherding, through being faithful to this task that God has called us to do. Is this easy? Is shepherding easy? It's very easy to get discouraged. To feel overwhelmed.

And I was thinking of Jacob. His 20 years of shepherding for Laban. Look what it says in Genesis 31.

He says, there I was. By the day, the heat consumed me. And did He get rest at night? And the cold by night.

And my sleep fled from my eyes. That's what it's like. 2 Corinthians 11, 28, Paul said, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety, my care for all the churches.

2 Corinthians 12, 15, I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. That's what Hebrews 13 is calling us to do. Keep watch over their souls by gladly being spent for their souls.

So, moving on from Hebrews 13, 17, what is one of the ways that's most effective to pay careful attention and know the condition of our flocks? I don't think it is just the informal meetings, but something formal, systematic, where there is like they do in Denton, you've got a list. And we did that a couple years ago when David was an elder and when Tawfiq was here. We divided the church up.

We had these lists. And we were all responsible to know the condition of all the people on that list. Now, different things happened.

Tawfiq's in Austin. David stepped down. John is back in Nepal.

And what do you know? We kind of got dwindled down. And then you get bigger issues that come up in the church that take all of the energy, and then all of a sudden, that gets neglected and put on the back burner. See, it's kind of like overwhelming pressure.

But we'd be fools to say we can't do better. Remember, even when I read that thing about the guy Cecil the other day, I'm thinking are there any violins in my life that I need to cut off? If your right hand offend

thee and cause you to sin by neglecting Hebrews 13 and 17, by neglecting Acts 20, paying careful attention to all the flock, if that caused you to sin by doing that neglect, cut it off and throw it away. I was even reading J.C. Ryle.

Listen to this. I thought, am I understanding this right? Ryle envisioned an ideal parish of 5,000 people in which only a third might belong to the church of England and argued that his men should visit 105 homes every week. I'm thinking, does he mean by men multiple? Because it sounded like one.

Because they had a setup of this one man. And then I was reading Richard Baxter. He would have a secretary who would go around the week before to contact all the families to be visited because it just took time to get a schedule without email and phone.

And Baxter would visit 15 families a week in his ministry. He wrote a book, Reformed Pastor. Fifteen families a week doing house-to-house visits.

What a thing. So what is a pastoral visit? I mean, what's at the heart of it? Knowing the condition of these sheep, right? That's at the root of it. How we find out your condition might happen in various ways.

It could be us going to your house. It could be you coming to our house. It could be a longer extended conversation.

Here on Sunday, where we leave with a sense we know the condition of that person. Questions were answered. Needs were met.

The ideal thing is us going to you or having you over with a specific intent. We're going to discuss spiritual matters, your concerns, and so on. What are the benefits? Benefits, number one, a deeper acquaintance with individual wants.

The benefit of knowing better how to pray for and preach to your present needs. The benefit of putting fires out before they start. The benefit of gaining your affection and confidence to win your hearts.

This helps us to win your souls ultimately. The benefit of increased love with one another. Listen to what Paul says, but we were gentle among you like a nursing mother taking care of her children.

Imagine we do a pastoral visit and leave and someone says, how was it? And you say, it was like a nursing mother taking care of her child. So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the Gospel of God, but also our own selves because you had become very dear to us. What's the benefit of pastoral visits? Just being reassured you're not forgotten.

It's easy for Satan to want to divide to make people feel unloved. And there are times ultimately that we will fail and you will not be receiving the love you should be. Lee Dodd, one of the pastors in Denton, he said this, I think you have to really view these in-home or over-a-meal at-a-restaurant visits as your major opportunity for real pastoring to take place.

In the meeting on Sunday, we counsel, pray, exhort, share, evangelize children, and so on. But these one-to two-hour meetings can be so fruitful. These pastoral visits.

Mack told me this, he said, so many people have said to me, I've never known pastors in the past, and you guys know me and care. Isn't that the crazy reality in our country? A lot of people go to churches, they don't even know the pastors. And the pastors don't know who they are.

How do you know the condition of your flock if you don't even know them? On a personal basis. J.C. Ryle in the Banner of Truth biography, page 141, said this, There will be something seriously lacking in the man who is not to be found in the homes of his people. If the excuse be offered that there is too much public work to do to give time to the private, then the priorities are wrong.

He deplored, he said, a growing disposition throughout the land among the pastors to devote an exaggerated amount of attention to what I must call public work of the ministry and to give comparatively too little attention to pastoral visitation and personal dealing with individual souls. And the author says perhaps Ryle's urgency on this subject was related to the remembrance of having never seen a pastor visit his own home growing up. We don't want that to be the case.

We want all of your kids to be able to say in these years, as many of them can say, that the pastors have been in our home. They've met with our parents. They've talked to us.

They know our names. The needs are being met. Questions.

So what is a pastoral visit not? Number one, it's not something to be intimidated by. It's simply encouraging a positive relational atmosphere of knowing your condition. Knowing each other better.

Greater love. Familiarity. It is not us micromanaging and telling you how to dress in certain things.

The focus is on the soul. And I say that because there's a lot of leaders out there who they want to tell you exactly what to do in certain areas. And there are areas we need to be strong in, but there's so many areas it's up to the believer and their own conscience and how God guides them through the Holy Scripture.

What is it not? This is not a checklist that we're trying to go through. I mean, for the Denton pastors, it's not like, okay, this is my checklist. I better get all this done this month or these two months.

No, it's out of love. What a privilege to visit all of these people or to have them over in these next two months and get to know their condition and their needs. And wow, we've never had them over.

I mean, I can think of some of you who I've never had over to my home. I don't like that being the case. Many of you have been, but I don't like it.

And we still haven't had the Blundells over. It's unbelievable. Even though they live in another state.

Forty-minute drive. Excuses, excuses, right? This is not something to cause you to say, oh, okay, well, they're going to be more systematic in pastoral visits, so I'll just wait for them to reach out to me in order to share a present problem. No, that's not it.

As we always have, we encourage you, come to us with your problems. Come. Bear it out.

Whatever it might be. Are there times to be sensitive? That with a certain workload or a conference or different things someone has, they might be a little more busy and you need a way, how important is this for me to go to one of the pastors with this? Sure, there's a place for that sensitivity. But the thing that I find and I hear too much, and it even came up in Jeff's interview, is this thought that oh, they're just so busy.

Brethren, there are nights I'm at home and I'm trying to think of who didn't end up having anyone over. And I'm trying to think who could I have over at last minute? Who could I go visit? And I'm sitting there and I

don't know. And so I end up not doing anything that night pastorally.

I'm not sitting there busy. What is this not? What are pastoral visits not? They're not anything that undoes anything that Tim has been speaking of from Ephesians about every member of the body having their own ministry. William Still, a pastor, he said this, healthy feeders need the pastors less and less.

At last, they need them no more as a nurse. They have found the solution to their problems and much more important, have learned to live with those which will only be fully solved in heaven. Now they're able to become, as I said before, pastors to others to help them solve their problems through the Word.

And so pastoral visits are not something to keep you from bringing something up, being intimidated. They're not something to make you think that others can't meet the needs. We all have ministries in the church whether in leadership or not, and you want to use those gifts and serve the body.

What are hindrances to pastoral visitations? Well, I talked to Mack and I said, what are hindrances? He said the biggest one is just interruptions and rescheduling. And that's going to happen. But Mack told me, he said the moment he gets off the phone with the person who had to cancel because of some family emergency, he right away looks at his list of all the people who have flexibility and schedule and he calls one of them and reschedules with that person to fill the slot.

What are hindrances? Well, what if we do meet? What if you get a pastoral visit from one of us, but during that time, there's no transparency? Is that going to help you at all? Is it going to mean no help? If there's no openness, no honesty, no transparency, it doesn't matter if you had a pastoral visit every night of the week, it wouldn't do any good. Now, if that did happen every night of the week, you had a different one of us visiting you eventually, I'm assuming you would crack or you would lock the door and keep us out. Look, we know how it is to have something where we're sliding a little.

We need to be confronted. We need an opportunity to pour out our heart. What are hindrances? Yeah, I kind of already mentioned it, but this thought that there's no one in the church who can really help or the pastors are so busy.

We had an email through I'll Be Honest years ago. Someone had a very serious struggle and in their email, they said, you know, I can't go to any of the pastors in my church. You know what I eventually found out about that person? They went to one of our sister churches that is a really good church.

You know why they were ultimately emailing an I'll Be Honest? Not going to one of their shepherds? Because of pride. They just felt like they didn't want the leaders there to know this was an issue in their life. They wanted to hide it.

Brethren, we're here to serve you. We have heard things that are troubling, but no matter how troubling it is, our response is we want to love this sheep. And now we find out this is true about their condition.

I mean, what person goes to a doctor and hides the fact they've got cancer? They say, I've got these symptoms, I might have cancer. They want to get a cure. They want to get help.

They want to make it to the end. What are hindrances to pastoral visits happening more systematically? Well, when you start visiting people, you find out needs you didn't know. And then guess what happens? Those needs sometime are so great that now it takes all sorts of time.

And that's right. It should. If in the hospital there's someone who might die, we should get all the doctors and the nurses around that one individual, right? And go back to those other cases.

But that can be one of the hindrances. It's a blessing to find out there's needs, but then you feel like your lack of time. Lee Dodd in Denton, he said this, we have had periods where keeping up was very difficult.

It felt overwhelming as the church continued to grow. You will certainly feel this as well. We actually used to visit all the flock monthly.

It was two to three years ago that we had to alter this and move over to an every two month schedule. Now, I forget how many households they have, but in our church, Craig said we have 116 households of members. 116.

116. So if everything goes forward with Jeff becoming one of the elders, and you divided it into a list of four, we'd have 29 people per list. If we were to do that every month, how many visits would we have to make a month? Twenty-nine.

I mean, every day. Now, you could say, wait a minute, didn't Richard Baxter do 15 a week? This isn't about trying to make any commitment to you all that we're going to do something in a certain amount of time. This is simply me saying our desire is to be more pastoral to you all and specifically in the area of pastoral visitations.

And we want to do better. We want to be all the more out to know the condition of the flock. And we don't want to hear people feeling like they're neglected.

And if you feel like you're neglected and you've got a need, then you come to us and you tell us about that need. So now we know about that condition directly from you. Satan will be right there slandering you.

They don't care. They don't have time. He'll say all sorts of things.

Don't listen to that. What are hindrances? Well, if you're just not thrilled about this. If you think, man, the last thing I want is one of the shepherds come into my house.

Lee Dodd, he told me this. He said, I would expect some of the brethren to be thrilled and some of the brethren to be less than that. He said with time, I think more and more, they will very much look forward to these times with their pastors.

What's another hindrance? Mixed desires in the body. When we were talking about this at our last elders meeting, one thing Tim brought up was this. Here there's people in the church saying, when are you going to start the Tuesday Bible study again? Okay, is the Tuesday Bible study beneficial? It is.

So then you got to weigh that out. Because if you start the Tuesday study, guess what happens? Tim and I are there at Tuesday involved in this study, and we're not going to be visiting anyone at their house. So now Tuesday's gone.

Wednesday's gone. At least the evening. So there's different desires in the body.

And you're trying to weigh out how much of a focus should this be in this season? Where I'm challenged is the Denton church for over 10 years has been consistent and systematic in pastoral visits almost since the beginning of their existence. And that challenges us. Because it's not been a reality here.

Pastoral visits have never ceased, but systematically and formally to do like what they're doing, that's a challenge. I remember Tim mentioned this four years ago or so. I mean, it just felt it was a challenge.

And it's good. We want to be challenged. We want to imitate others' faith who it seems are doing something right and biblical.

And when we hear it, when Mack is sitting in my living room and he's saying how much the sheep love this and appreciate this, you know, you're sitting there thinking, wow, if it's that beneficial, we'd be crazy to not strive harder. So there's all sorts of hindrances you could think of. One of our hindrances is a lack of pastors.

As Charles Leiter said, our church is the size where we need 10 pastors here for the size of the flock. Priority in our own lives could be something lacking. I've got to examine my own heart.

Mack Tomlinson said he considers pastoral visits equal as preparing to preach. Charles Bridges wrote fixed hours of the day should be devoted to it with the same determination as to the pulpit preparation. Okay, a couple more thoughts here.

So, say this happens, to whatever degree it happens, say I come over to your house. How can you help improve that time and make it more beneficial? It's not, you got to prepare. Here's some questions to prepare with and think about that, Evan, when I come to your house.

Take a spiritual assessment of where you're at. Just, Lord, search me. Try my heart.

Where am I at right now spiritually? And then be honest about your problems in the visit because we're there to help. We're there to shepherd. This visit is a perfect time to open up about struggles and get help.

Another thing, prepare questions that have been on your mind or areas you need to ask for advice on. There might be some job situation or some other thing. It's practical.

It might not even be necessarily spiritual. Write all those down. So there's the ability to go in there in an hour and a half or two hours and just go through all of these questions and have some direction in the time.

Max said some Tuesdays, he would go visit someone from 5 to 6.30, then someone from 7 to 8.30, then someone 8.30 to 10. He'd do through three visits in an evening. So stuff like that.

Prepare yourself, your mind, questions that you might have. Someone said your elders are physicians of your soul. Their task will be much easier and more effective if you will examine yourself and speak openly and frankly to them about your spiritual condition and needs.

Well, I'm expressing this desire of us doing pastoral visits in a more systematic and formal way. I guess the next question is when is this going to happen? Like I said, pastoral visits are already happening. But Craig has made lists just like they did in Denton.

And to some degree, we're going to start seeking to hammer through those. And Tim has a lot coming up with this conference and preparation and people are getting married and all these counseling situations. Jeff, if this vote goes through Lord willing, he's got evenings.

We're wanting to put time into this and see what happens. Jeff Thomas, when I interviewed him, he said in his 50 years of being a pastor, this is one of the greatest difficulties he had was just meeting with couples. Listen to what he says.

I think pastoring also is very difficult when visiting. When there are young couples, they've got children in the evening, the man's out at work in the day, you're not going to visit his wife by yourself. They're preparing the children for bed.

They really aren't free until 8, 830, and then they're getting tired. Jeff says this, I don't know how you get around that. I did some visiting in the evenings to people who didn't have children.

Well, this is what they do in Denton. The families, they know, okay, one of the pastors is going to visit us this evening. Max said if they've got young kids, they're seeking to get them in bed by 8. The pastor gets there at 8. They're able to have a two-hour conversation with not a lot of interruptions.

Or if it's earlier, Max said he'd bring his wife. His wife would actually watch the kids while he had a conversation with that couple. So do what you can to make it profitable, to make it work.

Here one thing is, you're going to get an email. If you're a member in this church, you're going to get an email sometime this week, and it's going to ask specific questions about your availability. One question I'm always asking myself is who in the church right now can meet during the day? You know, Alex Pena used to work night shifts, so I knew we could have them over for lunch because he worked night shifts.

Now he doesn't anymore. But who here is available during the day? That helps Tim and I with our schedules when we know who's available during the day. So we're wanting to have on this list of every member specific things about availability so we don't have to guess.

We can kind of look right there and see, okay, this person's on my list and they're available on this day and I've got an opening on that day. I'm going to contact them and try to organize this to happen. Or else it won't happen.

So, listen to this. Martin Lloyd-Jones. Godly man, right? And he was.

But Ian Murray commented to this on the biography. He says in 1952, lists were prepared which placed all the members of the church in groups depending on location of their homes in order to introduce a suitable system of visitation. Okay? They did that.

He did all that. And guess what happened? This scheme never came into effective operation. Now, one of the reasons it didn't was the way they structured that church.

And that's what he commented here. He commented, how many pastors did they have at Westminster? One. And that was their problem.

They weren't doing what the Bible says and having a plurality of elders, a plurality of pastors, a plurality of shepherds. If there's one man and you've got a list, that's overwhelming. But that's one reason we want to see God continue to raise up men to shepherd you all.

Because the more we have, the better. Already, when we have different meetings with people in our elders' meetings, we're going over how that meeting went with that individual so we all know the condition of that person. Because we all want to be in the loop on you guys' lives because we're all going to give an

account to God.

And you all are His treasure who He's bought with the blood of His Son. What value is more important than governing 200 planets and 200 worlds? So Lloyd-Jones, I was surprised by that in a way, but Richard Baxter says this, I must rather do what I can than leave all undone because I cannot do all. We don't want to leave anything undone, but we just want to do what we can.

So pray for us. Would you guys pray for us? Pray as you already are. If there are insufficiencies in all of us, pray for us in those areas.

And pray that in our desire to be faithful in a systematic, formal, pastoral visit, however long that takes us to do, we want to do it. And we want to be able to look back ten years from now and be able to be like the Denton church where there's been a consistency there. And I think it's something you guys will greatly appreciate.

Just looking at the members list, I was thinking, what members don't I know as well as others on just a personal basis of knowing them and their condition? I don't like that being a reality about any of the members in the church. Where it's just like there's something there, you're thinking, I don't have as a heart connection with that family, with that person. So like with the grace groups that we've just started, we hope pastoral visitations will all the more meet the needs of those in the body, grow the believers, that God might raise up more labors to send into the harvest, that we might be a more holy church, that we might all be more like the Lord Jesus Christ, and that He might be honored.

And it's amazing, the Bible says, He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. That's true, but God's given a means too, right? God uses a church. He uses a body.

He uses one another. He uses shepherds in the church. Rebukes, discipline, different things to keep us to the end.

So that's all I have here. I hope that was clear. I guess a summary statement in all of that is this.

There's a desire to be faithful and pastorally visiting you all, not letting anyone fall through the cracks. These desires have always been here in the life of the church, and pastoral visitations have always been going on, but not as we would like it to be. And the church in Denton is a very good challenge and example.

So pray for us. And when that email comes out this week, please respond to it if you're a member here. Look, what if at the end of the day, 50 people who are members still don't vote on this elder vote for Jeff Peterson? You know what that tells me? If we send out something on pastoral visitations to want to know your schedule, what if 50 people don't even respond to that? How's that going to help me? I guess those would be the first 50 we would need to meet with.

And you know what? Look, if you're stable here, and I know condition of many of you, there's stability here. Thank God for that. Stay stable.

Because there's different situations we've put in time into and dealing with. And even in that though, you never want to neglect the stable lest something happen. So let's pray.

Father, I pray that You would supernaturally through fillings of Your Holy Spirit in our lives enable us and give us grace to live out. Lord, give us Tim, Craig, myself, and Lord, as we see things with Jeff, Lord, willing for Jeff, Lord, we pray for supernatural enablement. Lord, help us to be more like the Lord Jesus.

Lord, help us to be more approachable. Help us to cut the violins that may distract. Lord, help.

Lord, help this church. Lord, give us more stability. God, please help.

And You have helped us so much. And so, Lord, You know our desire. You know my desire, Lord, just to live out these verses.

Father, just to live out Your Word. And if You've written it, will You not enable with Your power and strength us to do that which is righteous? Lord, help the brethren here. I pray, Father, You'd keep all of these sheep, that You'd get them to the end.

Lord, that we would look back in months and a year and not see a neglect of the meetings, but see a zeal to be at the meetings, Lord, and that we would see condition of different people who might be drifting, Lord, to have stability. So, Father, we need Your help. Lord, You are the Great Shepherd.

And we're ultimately looking to You. But Lord, help us to do what You've called us to do. So, Lord, we ask for grace, for help.

I pray, Father, You'd meet needs here today. Lord, meet the needs of different people who are here who have struggles. Lord, we pray for Craig.

You'd be helping him right now as he interacts with that primitive Baptist church up there in Temple. And Lord, be with that Nepal team. Praise well for Clayton Garrow, who it seems is getting nauseous that You would strengthen him to not be sick in this time.

Lord, we just look to You. We're absolutely desperate for You. Lord, protect our defenseless heads.

Forgive us of all our insufficiencies and lack of love and selfishness. Lord, we thank You for Your blood being shed, Lord Jesus. In Christ's name, Amen.

You're dismissed.

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