

5 Mistakes I made as a young Pastor in first 10 Years of my Pastoral Ministry

- Prem Narayan Bhattarai

In 2009 January, I took my first step as a weekend pastor in a local Baptist church in Kathmandu. I was a full-time youth staff at the Para-church organization, and I thought it would be cool to get a 'tag' of pastor in my name. It was 'the circumstances' that brought me into a pastoral role. This church was planted by a missionary, and a Nepali pastor was needed for his leave. Personally, being grown up as church planter's kid, never thought to be a pastor in a local church; I, instead had a 'dream' to be a full-time minister to work in Para-church organization. That would be full of fun, refreshing, and enjoyable travel opportunities.

After almost five years of this flexible, relaxed, and cool type-of weekend based preaching pastoral obligation, I decided to be a full-time pastor. And, I define it in my heart to be 'a faithful pastor.' There is much to say, however, let me share five mistakes that I made from my first five years of preaching pastor and later five years of full-time pastoral ministry. It is my honest confession, so I expect prayers from my senior friends and colleague that you will continue to pray for me as I prayerfully devout myself to the faithful pastoral role as a preacher and teacher. And my prayers for the young pastors and fresh theological graduates this will be an encouragement for you.

1. Neglecting God's Word for my soul.

Being a young man, theological graduate, I thought I know everything that I need to know. Reading God's word was a casual routine. Ministry duty and annual plan busyness often was an excuse not to read the Bible for my soul. As a result, slowly, I started to feel dryness in my own life. I almost quit the ministry and ran away for other options. To be filled with the Holy Spirit and listen to what God has to say, daily reading, meditating, and praying through the Bible is a must.

As I mentioned earlier, I grew up as a church planter's kid reading Bible was my habit even before coming to join a theological institution, I had completed reading the whole bible for four times or more. However, in ministry meditating and praying the Bible brings spiritual refreshment, and it re-energizes our souls. A person who does not love God's word will slowly die, and when it comes to a pastor, he fails to lead the congregation (Ps. 119:47-48). God's Word is so essential, and it does everything. It refreshes, strengthens, and it also has the power to transform lives.

2. A Careful Planning for Preaching and Worship Service.

As a young preacher and teacher, I confess I was easily tempted to preach-teach to impress people. I failed to plan a careful preaching schedule. What I preached and taught was also based on what I felt I like. God's Word, the whole Bible, is God's counsel. God gave the entire Bible not portions of it. Teaching the whole bible is needed to bring real transformation. As a pastor, we need to plan to preach from the Law, Prophets, Wisdom, History, Gospels, Acts, and Epistles to the Revelation in our churches.

Pride is one of the most fundamental sins, and most of us stumble in it. We need someone to come and dare to say 'you are a proud man.' And I do appreciate my friend who humbled me in it. Hearing critics after preaching is so hard, but we all need to know we always have rooms to improve. Unless we open up ourselves and be friendly enough to our congregation to come up and speak out about preaching is so vital.

It could be done in personal discipleship level, during church leaders meeting, etc. In my church, we meet up every Sunday mornings and spend time together to pray for ourselves, we pray for church members, and we review our Saturday service. It includes song selection, sound, and music, church attendance. My best part of it is to hear sermon critics; such terms I used, no-clear structure, an application was not relevant, and on and on. Well, I keep them as my notes and take seriously as I start writing my sermon transcript for the following week. It has humbled me, and I am growing a lot over the past years. The final part of this prayer and review is to plan for next Saturday. We select songs, Scripture reading based on sermon text and title. We delegate responsibilities and pray for this carefully through the week (1 Cor. 14:33).

3. Pray for the souls God has entrusted

Prayer is the key to Christian life. We must not neglect prayer life when we commit ourselves to the pastoral ministry. When we are overwhelmed by the ministry obligations and plan, we think we are capable enough and are doing what we are ought to do. The antidote of busy ministry life is to pause for prayer. Jesus did so. Whenever he was busy ministering to people, he used to pull himself out from the crowd and spent time with His Father (Luke 11:1). Dear pastors, we are to hold the accountability of souls before God, of those who are given to our church (Heb.13:17).

As pastors, we are called to love and care for our flocks. We are so many people-oriented, and we neglect time in prayer. We need to examine our prayer life. As a husband-and-father of your family, it is the pastor's responsibility to initiate and invite family members to spend time in prayer. We are called to provide pastoral care to our own family, first. Evaluate your prayer in your own family and prayer for your flocks. One of my favorite Puritan preacher and English writer John Bunyan puts this way, *"In prayer, it is better to have a heart without words than words without a heart."*

4. Neglecting Church Membership and Discipline.

Pastors are to watch over the flocks. Pastors are to be a true shepherd. From the very beginning of the church in the New Testament, it says 'those who accepted gospel message were baptized, and they were added to their numbers (Acts 2:41). The two gospel ordinances (believer's baptism and the Lord's Supper) are the boundary line of the ecclesia (lit. assembly of the called out people). These ordinances are given only for the local church and its local church's authority to preserve them and obey in a right manner (Matt.26:17-30; 28:18-20).

As a pastor, we ought to have the right biblical understanding of these ordinances to practice church membership and church discipline. Both are visual-symbols of the gospel to the world. Each is a new covenant that brings people into His kingdom. Being a young pastor, I failed to address sins of my flock, ignored them, and even during my teaching-preaching ministry, I did not rebuke, correct, and train my congregation. Especially young pastors may quickly fail to address marriage and family issues. However, authority doesn't come from one's self, or the name tag 'pastor,' instead, it comes from the Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Church discipline is biblical and a pastoral obligation (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-7). Pastors are commanded to teach right doctrine and preserve the true gospel (Acts 20:17-20). We hold the accountability of our flocks before God.

5. Short Sightedness and Seeking Satisfaction

It is a youth's tendency, and we must admit we look for a specified amount of time. One of my mistakes for several years as a young pastor, I never thought ultimately it is God's ministry, and I have nothing to gain or lose in it. I, rather though pastoral responsibility for me is just for several years. Honestly, it took years for me to realize after all I am a church member before I claim my role as pastor. I am not in a 'higher class' than any of my fellow church members. First and foremost, the pastor needs to be a faithful church member. Whether I am given pastoral responsibility by my congregation or tomorrow asked to sit down under someone else' pastoral authority, I need to examine my 'church member's office' and must accomplish my job description as this call of a church member. My pastoral ministry is ministry affirmation of my church members, and it is only by the Grace of God I am doing it. So, there is no terms and conditions for the pastoral ministry. Now, I regret for those years I prayed for specific years and though I will leave one day and will not be in this church. Now I have confessed and have entirely opposite mindset.

In pastoral ministry, we try to please people and satisfy them. The question is not whether I convinced people (or the group of people) but whether we are faithful to God and His Word or not. We cannot compromise this line (1 Peter 5:1-4). We are under the chief shepherd. The church is not our property; It is God's. The local church is a display of God's glory. This glory is of Christ's. Young pastors, like me, need to admit that Jesus is the head of the church (Col.1:18). The church is Jesus' bride (Eph 5:22-33).

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