

Conference Prologue 2012

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Learning to behave properly in church as a boy was no small task. That behavioral challenge was exacerbated by the reality that I was a PK (pastor's kid). My conduct was not merely an expression of my individual soul liberty for which I was accountable. My conduct also reflected on my dad and mom in their roles as parents and as pastor and wife.

I never struggled with outright rebellion. Fairly or unfairly, my defiance would have impacted the credibility of my parent's ministry. My behavioral challenges instead took the form of such problems as "juvenile restless leg syndrome", a malady created by the volatile mixture of too much boyhood energy, cramped sanctuary pews, and church services that never seemed to end. That combination had explosive potential.

Also during sermon time, I experienced an overactive mind and mouth, producing witty comments that popped out effervescently to my friends sitting next to me. Unfortunately, my comments had little to do with the message being preached—much to my father's chagrin and older pew members' dismay.

Keep your eye on this boy wearing a blue shirt entering from the left in this video clip. (Show video) That's my grandson Ben. The apple surely doesn't fall far from the tree.

In what was a display of divine irony (or justice), I came to realize that God in His eternal plan had determined my life's vocational calling was to serve as a pastor. Though my legs continued to be restless at times, and my mind never quits conjuring up some humorous thought, I found that a whole new set of behavioral challenges awaited me as I entered the pastorate.

I was not alone in facing the pastoral behavioral learning curve. The apostle Paul communicated with his young student Timothy to mentor him in the proper demeanor and execution of church ministry. Paul said to Timothy, "These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know **how you ought to conduct yourself** in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" I Timothy 3:14, 15.

The church in Ephesus that young pastor Timothy was shepherding was like any church. There were constant challenges to face. Here is a short list from I Timothy of what he had to navigate. It may sound similar to some of the challenges confronting you.

- Dealing with deficient teachers using faulty curriculum
- Guarding the centrality of the gospel
- Handling trouble makers in the congregation
- Developing positive community relations
- Providing gender role guidelines
- Establishing leadership qualifications

- Correcting truth distortions
- Establishing credibility as a young pastor
- Maintaining discipline in personal life and ministry
- Communicating properly when under pressure
- Caring for the needs of the elderly
- Determining pastoral salaries
- Staying physically healthy in the pastorate
- Managing personal finances
- Focusing on the right priorities
- Encouraging charitable donations

The ministry is not a vocation for a novice (I Timothy 3:6). The complexity of pastoral service requires the wisdom and experience of a seasoned veteran. Every young pastor needs a “been-there-done-that” perspective such as Paul provided to inexperienced Timothy as he embarked on his pastoral career. Even veteran pastors value from wise counsel and review and refinement of pastoral basics.

The general sessions this week are designed to allow the Apostle Paul to talk to us through the letter he wrote to Timothy. Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will help us through the messages preached by veterans of local church pastoral ministry to know better how to do “Authentic Church” God’s way. We will rethink how to conduct ourselves with integrity in the house of God, which is the church of the living God.

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