

**July 6, 2008**  
**Guest Speaker: Laird Crump**

**WHAT PASTORS WANT**  
*Traits of effective congregations*

Have you ever wondered what goes on in the mind of a pastor? Although pastors are real people just like you and me, they are in fact a strange breed, requiring unique gifting, to fulfill a unique role.

Most people have very limited understanding about what it is like to be a pastor, not for lack of desire, but simply because they never have been one. I have served on the Parent/Teacher committee at our kids schools and have helped out on field trips, but I really don't know what it is like to be a teacher because I have never been one.

But I have been a pastor. In fact I was a pastor for a long time. I now work for FOTF and spend much of my time ministering to ministers. I feel I have some credibility in doing that because I've been there, done that. But now I am a partner at this church, I am on the other side of the stage, which gives me an interesting vantage point on the relationship between a pastor and a congregation. And I have been thinking a lot about people's perceptions of a pastor.

In my work with FOTF, I meet with several pastors each week. Last year, through my personal contacts and through some of our pastors events and retreats I spoke with literally hundreds of pastors from Windsor to Niagara Falls to Ottawa and all over the GTA. I have spoken at numerous ministerial events – that's a fancy name for a bunch of pastors in a geographic area who get together to encourage and pray for one another. I have spoken in numerous denominations, from United to Pentecostal to Alliance to Baptist to Anglicans... I have spoken to various ethnic groups and just recently spoke at a Chinese pastors retreat. We conduct ministry couple retreats for clergy only. And as I spend much of my time listening to pastors, this is what I am hearing.

The pastorate offers incredible joy and fulfillment for these people. They will tell you that there is nothing like the local church when it is working well. But I am also consistently hearing story after story of pastoral pain, so much so at times it is overwhelming. The church is a family and every family is dysfunctional. And sometimes that dysfunction can be quite painful for church leaders.

Now clearly some pastoral pain is self inflicted. Pastors do make errors and at times are shortsighted. But I don't think it merits the kind of treatment many are experiencing. The bottom line on research by pollster George Barna and others is that pastoral ministry can be hazardous to your health.

Now let me predict your possible responses to me speaking on this subject today.

Some of you will be thinking – well it's about time someone tried to sensitize us to the unique needs of the clergy. I have always held them in high regard.

Others will be thinking – what's the big deal about being a pastor. It has its highs and lows just like any other job. I am tired of hearing people complain about their jobs.

Others still will be thinking – I thought that church was not about us, not even pastors. So why is Laird centering out pastors and leaders?

Others are just thinking about whether they will get a quarter chicken white or ribs when they go to Swiss Chalet for lunch!

Probably in this room there are about 30 ideas of what an effective pastor or church leader looks like.

Some feel that a good pastor is one who excels at public speaking. Others feel that an effective pastor is one who runs a tight ship and is a top-notch administrator. Some feel that a pastor ought to be a strong counsellor type. Then there are those who think that the pastor should be a jack of all trades.

There are a lot of ideas on the definition of an effective pastor – but few descriptions of what an effective congregation looks like. And I want to direct your attention to a passage from the Bible that speaks to this issue.

Now, let me make a few disclaimers before I continue.

- Ken did not ask me to speak on this, nor any of the other pastors or leadership team. Ken asked me to speak on something I felt God had really impressed upon my heart. This topic was my choice.
- I don't sense that currently there is any staff/congregation tension here at TOB. But I think it is at times of congregational harmony that we need to take time to think through issues instead of when in a crisis. If you are visiting with us here today you need to understand that churches have interpersonal conflict just like every family does including my family and your family. But mature families talk about the issues rather than just sweep them under the carpet. And that is why, now at this time of

church harmony it could be healthy for us to talk about church family relationships. Maybe for some visitors you have always been puzzled by pastors and church leaders. Hopefully some of these thoughts will be helpful for you in understanding church dynamics.

- I do not want to use this time as a personal therapy session. As a pastor I have been hurt in the past, as most pastors have, but I don't want to dump my issues here today.
- My intent today is not to admonish us as a congregation, but rather to remind us of some of God's ideals for the relationship between leaders and congregations.
- I don't want to give the impression that pastors are perfect and that they are always right. But I do think there is value in trying to see church life from their perspective.

Are you OK with that?

Mel Gibson made a movie a while ago that I did not see but heard about. It is called "What women want". Apparently the idea behind the film is that through some sort of magic, Mel Gibson was able to hear the thoughts that were going on in the heads of women. Because of that insight he was able to connect with women on a totally different level.

It made me think, if we as a congregation could get inside the mind of a pastor and hear what they are thinking and sense what they are feeling, I wonder if our attitudes and actions toward them would change.

God has some strong opinions on the relationship between pastors and congregations. I want to direct your attention to 2 key passages in the NT that addresses the subject of what God wants for congregations. The passages are from Hebrews 13:17-18 and 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 inspired by God and penned by Paul, a prominent first century pastor.

### **Hebrews 13:17-18**

**Be responsive to your pastoral leaders. Listen to their counsel. They are alert to the condition of your lives and work under the strict supervision of God. Contribute to the joy of their leadership, not its drudgery. Why would you want to make things harder for them? Pray for us. We have no doubts about what we're doing or why, but it's hard going and we need your prayers. All we care about is living well before God.**

### 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

**“Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord’s work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance. Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work. And live peacefully with each other.”**

Based on God’s instructions to a typical congregation like ours, here is what I think pastors may be saying or thinking in their minds. I wonder if pastors would probably just reiterate the things that God says here in the Bible.

#### **1. Please be responsive to me and the leadership God has entrusted me with and understand the difficulty and complexity of my role.**

Church leaders are made of the same stuff as everybody else but they are the designated leaders of a congregation. Most leaders I know are not power hungry, in fact they approach their task with fear and trembling. But pastors understand that somebody in the congregation needs to lead, and that they are the designated leader in a ministry segment, like youth ministry, worship ministry or for the whole operation, like a SP or Executive pastor. They are not infallible, but have been appointed to lead.

A pastor would probably be hoping in their mind that as they pray and seek God’s guidance on the direction of the church, that the congregation would be responsive to their leadership. [Hats illustration]

Let me explain the complexity of the pastoral role this way using three hats.

At times the pastor is to act as an employee of the board. They wear the employee hat (Hard Hat).

But at other times, a pastor supervises individual board members and church partners and they need to wear the employer hat (mortar board hat)

And then at other times a pastor serves simply as a friend (baseball cap). It is challenging for a pastor to know which hat to wear at what times, and also challenging for a congregation. I remember one person in a church I pastored at asking me, “Laird, are you my pastor or my friend”. I told him that I was both. And that was a hard concept for both of us to grasp. He was

offended that I didn't respond by saying I was exclusively his friend, not his pastor. This illustrates the complexity of the pastoral role.

Look at what God says in this passage again: (The passage is on the back of your program).

**“Be responsive to your pastoral leaders. Listen to their counsel. They are alert to the condition of your lives and work under the strict supervision of God.”**

Have you ever had a tough boss? Ever had a supervisor with incredibly high expectations and standards?

Think of the pressure pastors bear knowing that they answer, not just to pastoral team a board and a congregation, but to God.

When I was a pastor I did not realize how heavy that load was to carry. But when I left pastoral ministry I literally felt a huge weight had been lifted from my shoulders.

Now as I meet regularly with pastors I see that weight of responsibility all over them.

I think pastors would want us to know and respect that their role is a complex, sobering and sometimes heavy responsibility.

## **2. Please listen to me when I teach the Bible or give you Christ centered counsel.**

Again, that is in keeping with God's instruction.

One of the key roles of a pastor is to teach. Our role as a congregation is to listen and to hear what they are saying about God's word and God's agenda for the church.

A lot of hard work goes into a sermon or a Bible study or a worship segment.

Here is something that I am learning. Even though our pastors are great Bible teachers and inspiring leaders, I need to take responsibility for my own spiritual growth. I come to church to get some Bible teaching and spiritual inspiration but then I need to go home and put that into practice.

Parents, have you ever just gone grocery shopping and then your kids peer into the fridge and make the comment: There's nothing to eat in this house!

There is a lot of food in the house but perhaps the child is a little too lazy to prepare something to eat. Likewise, spiritually, I need to prepare myself some spiritual food throughout the week.

Using this food analogy, the pastoral staff prepares a great feast for us every Sunday. And it is healthy for our souls. But if that is the only food we are getting each week then we will be malnourished, because we need to eat spiritually more than once a week. Pastors want

people to listen to their teaching but then really want them to take responsibility for their own spiritual growth throughout the rest of the week.

We can do that by reading some Christian Bible study books, or getting into a Bible reading plan. How about getting into a Small Group to study the Bible together with some other Christians? We can also hear all of our favourite Bible teachers on line. Or, very simply, a few times a week we can read a passage from the Bible and prayerfully ask ourselves 3 questions – what does this say, what does this mean and how does this apply to my life. If I am not growing spiritual it is not my pastor's fault, it is mine.

### **3. Please contribute to my joy, don't make things difficult for me.**

H.B. London has a label for constant complainers in the church – he calls the “joy-suckers”. A pastor teaches a great sermon or leads a great meeting or facilitates a great Bible study where God's spirit is really impacting people – and then as the people are leaving the church building, there is always one guy who complains about something to the pastor just before they leave... and the joy is sucked right out of the pastors heart. As a church partner, I don't want to be a joy-sucker, do you?

Do you know what brings joy to a pastor's heart?

- When we share some insight God brought to us during their teaching
- When we share some highlights of our own spiritual growth
- When we get off the bench and into the game and take church work seriously
- When we facilitate for a pastor to work in the areas of their strengths
- When we encourage them

Do you know what adds to a pastor's drudgery?

- When we complain about things but never make an effort to be part of the solution
- When we compensate them inadequately. The Bible says clearly that those who teach the word are worthy of double honour, clearly indicating they are to be paid extremely well.
- When we compare our church to others and ask the pastor - why can't our worship style or kids ministry be more like that church down the road?

- When we unfairly criticize with a cold heart or when we dump and run – criticize without offering positive suggestions
- When we shun them or dispose of them after their years of service are done

But let me speak to another way to contribute to the drudgery of a pastor.

Do you know what the number one reason is for why pastors resign from a church? The number one reason why pastors resign from churches is because of conflicting vision and values. It is a pastor's job, with the board, to envision God's desires for the ministry and then to vision cast to the congregation according to agreed upon values. But often when a vision is clarified then people tend to push back.

Most of this "pastoral push back" is surfaced by style preferences. If a church has the vision to reach out to the community then the pastors will craft a style conducive to reaching community people. In the area of music that of course means that a church would utilize contemporary music, the kind that most people would preset on their car stereo. Pastors take all kinds of heat on competing style preferences and it is impossible to please all the people all the time.

Studies show that when a pastor leaves a church under duress, it is usually because of the negative influence of 4-6 people. There could be 400 happy people in the church, but 4 can make a pastors life miserable. I don't know about you but I don't ever want to be one of those 4.

I love this church for several reasons. I appreciate the kids and youth ministry. I love the worship style. But also, I love this church because it is...

Grace based

Emotionally mature

Outwardly focused

Culturally relevant

It is a safe place

These traits are all reflective of this church's vision and values.

If I wanted a different flavour of church it would be unwise of me to try to force TOB into my style. It would be better for me to find another church that I resonated more with.

That doesn't mean I can't have constructive conversations with the leaders about these issues, but once a church clarifies its vision and values I need to either get on board or get

out of the way, I know I can add to the drudgery of the pastors by continuing to push back on these issues.

God asks in this passage – why would you want to make things harder for them? That is a good question that is in the mind of every pastor as well.

#### **4. Please pray for me and my family**

Pastors are marked and targeted by the enemy. The evil one knows that if he can bring down the leader he can take over the flock. I need to be regularly praying for all of our staff and their spouse and children. I want to pray for joy in ministry, for protection from the evil one, for creativity and enthusiasm, for wisdom and sensitivity

Listen to what Gardiner Spring wrote over 100 years ago (1785-1873)

**“Let the thought sink deep into the heart of every church that their minister will be such a minister as their prayers make him. ... How perilous is the condition of that minister ... whose heart is not encouraged, whose hands are not strengthened, and who is not upheld by the prayers of his people! ... “It is at a fearful expense that ministers are ever allowed to enter the pulpit without being preceded, accompanied, and followed by the earnest prayers of the churches. It is no marvel that the pulpit is so powerless, and ministers so often disheartened when there are so few to hold up their hands. ... When the churches cease to pray for ministers, ministers will no longer be a blessing to the churches.” Gardiner Spring (1785-1873)**

Not politically or gender correct but you get the message.

#### **5. Please respect and love both me and my family**

The Bible clearly tells us here to treat our leaders with, not just respect, but with great respect, with great honour. The NIV translates this phrase – hold them in the highest regard. It used to be that being a minister was considered an honorable vocation. People treated pastors with great respect. But somewhere along the way the NA church lost that perspective. Some of that has been because of high profile ministers who have done some stupid things, and granted, even pastors need to earn respect. But regardless God’s instruction here to us is to hold our pastoral leaders in the highest of regard.

As well as being the shepherd, pastors are also sheep and need lots of TLC just like everybody else. They too have feelings. They need the love and support of the church family members. And so does their family. Being married to a pastor is, in my mind, even more difficult than being a pastor. And being a PK is no great thrill either. Sometimes if a pastor takes an unpopular stand on an issue, some church people shun their spouse and family. The family of a pastor also carries a heavy load. We need to excel at loving pastors and their families.

## **6. Please get along with each other**

Just like a parent, much of a pastors job is helping spiritual siblings to get along with each other. That can be so draining and time consuming. It distracts pastors from more important things.

In Philippians 4, Paul the first century pastor pleads with two women named Euodia and Syntyche to get along. Presumably their bickering was sidetracking the mission of the church. In a sense, pastors are like congregational parents. I don't know about your family, but when my kids are bickering with each other (which is rare) it creates a lot of stress in the family. But when I see them working out their issues responsibly with each other, then I know they are on their way to maturity. That pleases me as a parent.

The passage tells us to "live peacefully" with each other. That doesn't mean we have to agree on everything or even to be lovey-dovey with everyone, but it does mean that we as a congregation are to work hard at peace and unity. That is no small task. Most churches that go through hard times or experience church tension, do so not over big strategic issues but rather over interpersonal conflict and issues of emotional immaturity.

Well more could be said but let's review quickly what might be going on in the mind of a pastor

- 1. Please be responsive to me and the leadership God has entrusted me with and understand the difficulty and complexity of my role.**
- 2. Please listen to me when I teach the Bible or give you Christ centered counsel.**
- 3. Please contribute to my joy, don't make things difficult for me.**

#### **4. Please pray for me and my family**

#### **5. Please respect and love me and my family**

#### **6. Please get along with each other**

Sound simple? Well it's not. It takes real intentionality for a congregation to live up to its end of the relationship. Our Daily Bread, the Christian magazine had an article on July 13, 2003 called Getting Rid Of The Pastor. Here is what it said.

Not long ago a well-meaning group of laymen came from a neighboring church to see me. They wanted me to advise them on some convenient and painless method of getting rid of their pastor. I'm afraid, however, that I wasn't much help to them. At the time I had not had the occasion to give the matter serious thought. But since then I have pondered the matter a great deal and the next time anyone comes for advice on how to get rid of the pastor, here's what I'll tell them. One, look the pastor straight in the eye while they are preaching and say "amen" once in a while and they'll preach themselves to death. Two, pat them on the back, brag on their good points and they'll probably work themselves to death. Three, dedicate your life to Christ and ask the pastor for some job to do, preferably some lost people you could win to Christ and they'll die of heart failure. Four, get the church to unite in prayer for the pastor and they'll soon become so effective that a larger church will take them off your hands!

Will we agree with every decision pastors make? Of course not. They are human just as we are. But our obligation is to follow their lead, get on board with the changes that need to be made and then pray for them as often as we can. Can you see how powerful this partnership can be for the church? Under God's authority, as leaders lead effectively and as people follow effectively great gains can be experienced for the kingdom of God.

In Judges 5, after a great victory in battle, inspired by the prophet Deborah, a song was written and sung. Here is the opening line of that song.

#### The Song of Deborah

Israel's leaders took charge, and the people gladly followed. Praise the Lord! (Judges 5:2)  
There is a principle there for us. When leaders lead and people follow, so much can be accomplished and more importantly, God is praised!