Why Pastoring Is Humbling

Luke Hulley 5 June 2025



Being a pastor in God's Kingdom is nerve-wracking stuff. God consistently and deliberately puts us in impossible situations which require a God intervention.
In pastoring, you face countless situations where you do everything you know to help someone. You reach the end of yourself, the end of your abilities, the end of all your 'know-how' and the person is still blinking at you blankly, not having any idea what you are talking about. Yet another situation where you think, 'If God doesn't come through for this person, they're a goner!'

> In pastoring, you face countless situations where you do everything you know to help someone. You reach the end of yourself, the end of your abilities, the end of all your 'know-how'...

As we grow in the skill of leadership and pastoring people, our toolkit grows, and we get better at helping people. But no matter how skilful we become, we're always brought back to this: only God can change hearts.

The Saul Syndrome

The story of Saul is insightful on this. One of the most revealing moments of his kingship came at Gilgal. The Philistines, Israel's archenemies, had assembled a massive army. Saul's own troops were melting away in fear as they waited for the prophet Samuel to arrive and seek God's favour before battle.

Saul knew 'the battle belongs to the Lord' and all that, but his most pressing concern was that both God and his prophet were running late. Very late. Faced with mounting pressure, Saul felt he had to do something. So, he did. He offered the sacrifice himself—a job reserved for the priest.

It was a bold move. But it was a big mistake. A mistake that ultimately cost him the entire kingdom. Lesson learned: Leadership skills are important, but even more important is the humility to wait and trust for God's intervention.

'Ordinary church' requires divine, miraculous interventions every day of the week.

As leaders, we feel the weight of responsibility. We feel the pressure to take action. Maybe someone in your church just went on a date with a random guy she met on Tinder, and your heart sinks. Or you challenged someone whose life no longer reflects a love for Christ, and now they're offended, calling the church judgemental and thinking of leaving. Perhaps there's a couple who've been coming to church for a year but still live together, and when you ask if the Holy Spirit has convicted them about their living arrangement, they stare at you blankly and say, "No. What do you mean?"

> Leadership skills are important, but even more important is the humility to wait and trust for God's intervention. 'Ordinary church' requires divine, miraculous interventions every day of the week.

So, you swallow hard and trust God for a miracle. Again. It's hard to know when you've done enough. It's hard to know when to act and when to wait. But this much is clear: Only He can lift the veil of deception. Only the Holy Spirit can bring true repentance. Only God transforms hearts.

God will test us as leaders, just like He tested Saul. When the people around Saul looked to him for action, God was watching to see if Saul would trust Him. That test revealed Saul's heart. And it revealed to God that Saul was not the man He was looking for.

God sought a man after His own heart—and found him in David.
David wrote, "Now this I know: The Lord gives victory to his anointed. He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary with the victorious power of his right hand. Some trust in chariots and some

in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God." – Psalm 20:6-7

From this, we can draw three lessons:

1. God Doesn't Expect Us to Have All the Answers

Jesus chose Peter, impulsive, outspoken Peter, to be the first pastor of His church. That's deeply encouraging.

Peter strikes me as an impulsive, speak-first-apologise-later sort of guy who is severely lacking in soft skills. But Jesus looked past all that and said, "Do you love me? Feed my sheep."

Later, we find Peter to be a pastor of pastors. He writes to his fellow pastors, "Shepherd God's flock, not because you must but because you are willing."

Peter was willing to be used by the Lord to care for His people, even though he was an unlikely choice.

I find myself daily being asked questions that I don't know the answer to—daily faced with tricky pastoral conundrums that are like unsolvable riddles. That's just another normal day for me.

> **But it's not our job to produce outcomes. That's the Spirit's role. God's people, just like unbelievers, need regular Holy Spirit interventions.**

I feel the pressure to take decisive action, but it's a test. People may expect me to know what to do, but God expects me to wait on Him to do the impossible, usually in unexpected ways.

Our congregation is full of 'no-hopers' who should never have made it this far. If it were up to our 'skill' as pastors, they definitely would no longer be with us.

2. God's Breakthrough May Come Through Someone Else

Saul made the mistake of assuming that, because Samuel was not present to make the necessary offering and seek the Lord for them, he should step in to fill the gap.
In reality, God often uses others to minister in areas where we can't.

Very often, as we entrust people to God's care, God will bring in other gifted people who are carrying His anointing to bring breakthrough into the specific area where people have need.

David's army began as a ragtag bunch of misfits, but God added mighty warriors—men who were uniquely gifted and anointed for victory. They won many battles for David and made him

look like a brilliant leader. But it was God's favour that brought those men at the right time.

We must be humble enough to recognise that while we shepherd faithfully, the breakthrough might come through someone else. And that's okay. What matters is not who gets the credit, but that God's people find freedom.

3. There Is No 'Formula' for Success

We should keep developing our pastoral skills. Diligence and faithfulness matter. But we must resist the temptation to think that what worked in bringing one person through will work every time with every person.

When people's hearts are closed to the Lord, only the Spirit can find the key to open them. This means that a 'pastoral formula' is not the answer. You can be doing everything right as a pastor and still not be able to bring someone through.

Consider this: we can present the gospel to unbelievers clearly, and people may still not respond. In the same way, we can pastor believers with care, wisdom, and persistence, and people may remain stuck.

When this happens, it's easy to take it personally and feel like a failure as a pastor. 'I did everything right, how can they still be doing so badly?!'
But it's not our job to produce outcomes. That's the Spirit's role. God's people, just like unbelievers, need regular Holy Spirit interventions.
Rather than lying awake at night trying to figure people out, our time would be better spent praying and surrendering control to God who is the true Shepherd of our souls.

Liberating Surrender

What does this all mean for pastors in God's Kingdom? It's good to grow in skill. It's important to be faithful. But our confidence isn't in our ability—it's in God's power.
As David so aptly put it, our trust needs to be in God: "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God."

That's actually liberating. Faith in self is exhausting. Faith in God brings peace. Yes, we are responsible for the people we care for, but we must remember what that means, "One plants, another waters, but God gives the growth." 1 Corinthians 3:6

This article was originally published on Luke Hulley's personal blog as Why pastoring can be so

humbling

on 22 May 2025, and has since been revised and published on 5 June 2026 on Four12 Global.