

Shepherd's Guild: How to Handle an Unexpected Departure

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[0 : 00] Hey, welcome to a private invitation only podcast series I'm calling the Shepherds Guild. This is Chris Oswald. If you are listening to this, it's probably because I shared the link with you directly.

These are private podcasts. You are welcome to share this with other pastors that you know. I would just simply ask that you use discretion to do so. There's nothing especially controversial about this, but I do want to talk about my pastoral ministry in a way, including present challenges, in a way that is somewhat transparent.

It's really not the ideal kind of thing to just disseminate so broadly as some of my own church members would hear some of this. I don't think I'm going to say anything that I would really want to apologize for, but it's just not geared to be helpful to them.

So if you're hearing this, I do encourage you to listen. I think that this is going to be helpful. The reason that this is even happening is that I'm currently going through a season where I'm trying to walk with a group of guys locally that I've known for a very long time.

And I'm just trying to equip these guys that I love to handle some of these issues. And I'm realizing just that, you know, I've not done really any writing for 30 years. Some of that's been intentional. I made a decision not to write anything until I turned 50.

[1 : 12] I turned 50 in a couple months. I just didn't want to be one more young voice in the evangelical book cart. I thought that it would be good to just wait and see who I was at that age.

And so I haven't ever really written a lot down. And I want to begin to kind of dip my toe in that pool and basically just share, for the most part, pretty practical things that I wish I had been taught years ago.

Things that I've learned the hard way, for the most part, as you'll hear in this podcast. I've got one coming up in a few weeks probably on really just intended to strengthen the pastor's conscience on the topic of financial generosity.

So that you'll be able to communicate and encourage financial generosity to your people in a way that is just really coming from a place of deep conviction. I do believe that we have some conscience issues as good pastors, especially.

We have some conscience issues related to how we encourage giving. And I think that I've got some stuff to share there that will strengthen your conscience and allow you to encourage giving in a way that is rooted in deep, good theology, a good understanding of a covenantal transition from the old to the new and how that affects giving.

[2 : 31] And so you guys are familiar with all the complexities that come up in that topic. So that'll come in a few weeks probably. This one is dealing with how to handle a departure, an unexpected departure from your church and probably a departure that you probably don't agree with.

So the reason that I'm handling this one today is because we're walking through one of those situations, an unexpected departure from a relatively high profile family in our church.

And it would be one of those that I don't think is going to be especially problematic. It could become a problem, to be honest with you. And I'll explain why in a minute. I don't necessarily think that it will. But it's the kind of situation that invokes enough pain in my own heart, enough confusion amongst my leadership team.

And it's just going to have to be dealt with. And so because mostly I'm trying to equip the guys that I'm walking with, I realized I do have a pattern that I follow for this kind of stuff.

And I believe that this is the pattern that is pleasing to the Lord. And I can commend it to you. But I've never really written it down or never really explained it in its totality.

[3 : 41] And so I thought I would do that today. I do think this could be kind of long. But so prepare to take breaks. I've got all my sparkling water set up here on my desk.

I've got this brand that Ange buys for me now. It's called Bubbly. And the one that I go to now, I'm a sparkling water fiend. And the one that I'm doing now is called Bellini Bliss.

And it's peach and pineapple flavors in the water. Pretty awesome. So I'm ready to talk. And I've actually already prepared a thorough outline for this discussion. And let's jump right into it.

First big thing, I think, is that you need to understand that there are so many different kinds of departures that are going to require different responses. And today I'm just handling the one that I'm dealing with now.

And it is probably, in my opinion, the one that is the most common. And it's the one that is probably the most common that reaches a certain level of difficulty that would require a process.

[4 : 37] There could be some that are less common or maybe more common that just don't really require much work or effort. But this one would be, you know, it's thorny enough to need a process.

Let's put it that way. It's really better in these kinds of situations to have a process and then veer from it according to your own discretion than to not have any process at all. So the particular situation I'm dealing with now is as follows.

I'll try to state it as generally as possible. We were just given an unexpected announcement. Unexpected in the sense that there were no conversations that led up to this that any of us had with this family.

That they are departing. They're departing with appreciation for our church or stated appreciation for our church, for the pastors here. But there was no consultation. The decision was made without us.

And this is a family that has some prominence. I wouldn't say that it's massive, but some prominence in our church. And so, you know, there's just going to be some issues that are going to arise from this.

[5 : 41] So I do believe that's kind of the most common departure that requires attention from us would be something like a sudden departure, a reason given that is not divisive, appreciation stated, and yet just doesn't feel right to you as you're hearing it.

Part of the reason it doesn't feel right to you is because you were kind of surprised by it. At least there was no conversations had beforehand. So that's pretty, I realize that's a pretty tight lane to discuss.

I do believe it's very common. And I do believe that you can veer from this. You can apply some of these lessons to every possible departure you'll ever encounter, while some of them will be more specific to these particular conditions.

The first thing we'll do is I just want to tell you what we're going to talk about. The first one is there are at least two philosophical considerations I want you to keep in mind as you're processing this. I also want to talk a little bit about how to take care of yourself in a situation like this.

And then I want to provide a good template for how to have that kind of closing conversation with that departing family, assuming that they're willing to have that conversation. And then I want to talk a little bit more about you and maintaining what I would call a good emotional hygiene after they leave, handling the disappointment, and just kind of knowing what to do with yourself after they leave.

[7 : 07] Okay. So there's two philosophical considerations that I think are important that I would want everybody to understand. And the first is that I believe that a lot of the trouble we have with these departures comes from actually really good instincts that we have, that God has given us, not due to our own greatness, but that God really esteems the pastoral ministry.

And He does intend for us to be an extraordinary instrument in His hand to care for His people. And so I believe He deposits things in us, values and senses in us that we need to understand and then thank God for and use the right way as we handle this.

And the first is that you need to understand that one of the reasons that you may feel some unease is that the reality is that quitting is contagious.

You know, every voluntary association in particular, which a local church would be, is built on some altruistic presuppositions around the idea of commitment to one another.

And sort of this basic idea that's really not necessarily spoken about a lot, but it really keeps a team intact, is a commitment to one another that is bigger than our individual preferences or individual seasons of weariness or mood or so on and so forth.

[8 : 32] And, you know, you will not have a church. You will not have a missional team. I think a church is just a missional team. You will not have that if suddenly no one is committed to one another.

So one of the things to understand is, like, if you're feeling uneasy, that's probably good because it means that you've got a good martial instinct as a leader. You understand that quitting is contagious and that when someone kind of departs for what is stated to be a relatively benign preference-based reason, you can see that in some ways that family has unintentionally, I would say, vandalized the virtue of commitment in full view of all your other people.

And that there is a chance that the Overton window has been shifted into making quitting for the sake of preference a thing that is even doable or acceptable.

And so you are – there is a threat here to the martial spirit, to the esprit de corps of your people when someone leaves in this way.

And that's just – you just need to understand that. Sheep are herd animals. We follow each other for good and for bad. And so that's happening in this situation. There's a prominent enough family, respected enough, that for them to leave for what is really just a preference issue is going to essentially give the devil an opportunity to suggest to others that that kind of weak level of commitment is acceptable.

[10 : 14] And, you know, that's – you know that these sheep are herd animals and you know that, you know, you could have an avalanche kind of a problem here and that quitting is contagious. And so that's – it's right to be concerned about that.

Of course, we serve God and he is in charge of everything. So we have to really make sure our faith is optimized, you know, leading up to these things ideally.

But you – it's okay for you to feel a little – like that is not necessarily just about you. It can be because you have a regard and an understanding of what it means to lead a group of people in a voluntary association.

You realize that, like, it's actually kind of a tentative thing, you know, that the idea of commitment as a virtue is a spiritual commitment.

And this has been violated in full view of your people. And so, yeah, it's potentially contagious. It's a problem. How do you respond to that?

[11 : 17] Well, you need to be careful because the devil is a slanderer and he can use even just the misuse of words on your part.

He can use that to conflate your care for the body and your love of commitment in all sorts of slanderous ways, you know, that you're an autocrat, that you're a tyrant, that you're a cult leader and so on and so forth.

I don't think you can live in that fear. I think you have to operate in good faith, generally without guile. But at the same time, just understand that this is really where your own ability to control your tone of voice, your presence, and so forth, this is going to really matter here.

And your ability to handle this well as a leader is going to depend to some degree on just some of the ways that you've learned to control yourself over time. I do believe that it's reasonable for you in private without being overly gossipy or slandering.

I do believe it's reasonable for you in various contexts to just say, I personally think that commitment should be above individual preferences and that at the end of the day, all we have really is a commitment to one another.

[12 : 29] And you can definitely root that back to the gospel. I do think you can push back on it a little bit in conversations, especially with other key members or with your leaders and so forth, and just say, I don't agree with this.

I'm not angry. I just don't agree. I think we can't all just go do, we can't all just depart the commitments we've made because we like this music better or this program better or so forth.

I do think it's appropriate for you as a pastor to speak into that. I would just encourage you to speak into that with a hopeful tone and a confident tone, not a fearful, bitter, or resentful tone.

But I do think it's appropriate for you to speak into it a little bit. Just be careful not to accidentally endorse your enemy's inclinations to label you as controlling and so on and so forth.

It's not that you can avoid all of that, but you should be wise and think through how this is coming across and so forth. That's one philosophical consideration.

[13 : 36] The truth is that when someone leaves, they are kind of vandalizing the virtue of commitment. They're sort of degrading it. They're giving other people the opportunity to reevaluate something that they probably shouldn't reevaluate.

And that is that it's really just better if we all just stay together, stay committed to one another, and not allow individual preferences to break this commitment. So that's one philosophical idea.

The other philosophical idea is kind of completely on the other side, and that is I really encourage you to see the addition by subtraction as a routine means of grace by the Lord.

And I think this shows up all over the Bible. Gideon's an obvious example of that. But really, just the whole idea of election, the whole idea of God choosing a small group of people, the seed of David, out of the stump, a sapling emerges.

And just this idea that God does routinely add to his glory and frankly add to his people's peace through subtraction. And that we need to just remember that that is a routine means of grace.

[14 : 48] It is really often a good thing when God takes someone away. There are some reasons for that that I want to go into. One is that there can be within a group of people some underlying theological differences that will not emerge until they're tested at a certain point.

So you can have a relational unity and you can have a missional unity where you're all kind of going in the same direction. But there can be, even in relational and missional unity, there can be some theological disunity that you didn't even know about.

In this particular case that I'm dealing with, there was a pretty substantial theological disunity that I didn't know about and I don't think they knew about. And that was simply, I and many others that are listening to this view God's will through the lens of how he has providentially put certain leaders in my life, especially the leaders of institutions that I'm called to submit to.

So I could never say, I could never in good conscience say, I have sought the Lord's will on this issue if I hadn't also consulted those that God has put in authority over me.

That's, I mean, that's a fundamental for me in terms of discerning the Lord's will. And it's also speaks to some of the other issues that are connected to that, like me doubting myself enough to go to my positional leaders and so forth.

[16 : 20] And in this particular case, that there was no relational rift between me or any of the other pastors and this party. They would say that as well. So we would not, we would not have identified that theological difference, but it's pretty big.

I mean, it kind of gets down to basic things like view of man, view of themselves, view of how God works. I would never find myself in this situation where I would go to my pastor later on and say, hey, I've made this monumental decision and I didn't consult you and don't try to change my mind.

And that's what this family that's leaving is doing. And so that's a big deal. And that was there all along. I just didn't know it. And I don't know if they knew it.

We had missional unity. We had relational unity. We did not have some very fundamental theological unity. And I think that God rooted that out in this particular situation and exposed it.

And I think it's important for that to have been exposed. I think it honestly, the timing for this is, I think, good for a number of reasons. And I think it was good for God to show that problem.

[17 : 34] So remember, just generally, biblical theology-wise, addition by subtraction is actually a thing. And it's a means of grace. One of the things going on here in this particular case, I think you'll see this when you experience departures too, is there's some disunities that don't get exposed quickly.

They take a few years. And when they get exposed, it's like, oh, that's actually kind of a big deal. In our particular situation, I'm walking with a group of men that are all caring, trying to level up into pastoral care.

And none of us would have done this the way they did this. This couple did this. We just would have. We have all had experiences where we've consulted with even people we weren't in great unity with.

But they were our positional leaders. And so we felt like it was necessary to talk to them. So that was one thing that God's doing in this particular situation. Just remember that that's common, not just broadly, that God adds by subtracting, but also he spares us.

There's some disunity that you just can't build certain things on if there's an incompatibility at a fundamental anthropological or theological level. It turns out that there was that here.

[18 : 50] The second is just remember that there's this saying, a coward dies a thousand deaths. And the idea is that it's better just to take the bullet than to just keep trying to minimize the damage, rip the Band-Aid off once.

The reality is that while we should pursue unity and have forbearance and so on and so forth, if there's a conviction at that deeper level that's so different, then I think it's probably hard to overstate how good it is of God to just let that happen.

And for you and I to rejoice in that. The other things to think about is that we serve this God who is able to build multiple local churches all at the same time.

But remember, the local church is not blood-bought in the same way. I know this doesn't sound very controversial. In the same way that the invisible churches and that saints are.

At the end of the day, it is best for you to always have the highest regard for the individual saints when individual saints compete with your institutional vision.

[20 : 14] It's good for you to have an institutional vision. It's good for you to build a local church. It is a means of grace. Remember, this is all fundamentally about God's people. And the reality is that God could be caring for everybody perfectly, I think he is, at the same time with a departure.

So it could be a blessing to you in some reason for one way or another. It could be a blessing to your church. It could be a blessing to the people leaving. It could be a blessing to the church that those people are going to.

And you just need to remember this stuff is way above your pay grade. And he is good. God is good. He loves his sheep. And he builds up his universal, invisible church and does so by taking care of his particular sheep.

The truth is that there are some lessons that God teaches a saint through one local church. And then he teaches that same saint different lessons in another local church.

It happens all the time. I'm not arguing that that's ideal. I'm not arguing that that's ultimately the way it should be. It just is the way that it is. And in doing that, I think, especially like with the couple that I'm dealing with, they're going to be, I think, to some degree of valuable members of a new local church.

[21 : 34] They're also going to have some – they're going to bring some liabilities. I just can't – because I'm not God, I just can't sort out all of that. But I can trust that he's good.

And I think the other thing to just remember in this particular situation that I'm in is one of the things that is at play here is a significant degree of emotional maturity.

Now, I'm going to get really specific for a minute, but then I want to broaden this out. We don't understand, I think, as pastors how people grow in uneven ways and how they're sanctified and matured in uneven ways.

You know, in this particular case, just broadly speaking, there's something that I – a phenomenon I've noticed where elite professionals like doctors or attorneys, they missed out on something that a lot of us had.

And that is, you know, in our 20s, we're basically puppies in a litter. And we're learning how to play and work together. And we're learning how to interact and so forth. Well, it's kind of unfortunate – I'd say it's more than kind of unfortunate, just a reality – that when you've got, you know, elite professionals, doctors, attorneys, where these extended degrees and extended professional investment is required on the front end, massive amount of hours and so forth, you will wind up with puppies that didn't get to play in the litter very much.

[23 : 01] They were studying for their LSAT, right? And so – for the bar or whatever. And so one of the things to bear in mind is that, you know, in this particular case, I've got some people who have, you know, outsized competency compared to emotional relational maturity.

And that's, you know, that's just the way – that's just the way God does things. He doesn't – he doesn't sanctify us all at the same time. The thing about that just generally – and we as pastors get told this all the time, so we understand it is really just dangerous to have, you know, excessive giftedness without, you know, matching godliness.

It's – when you've got that situation where you've got outsized competency compared to, say, emotional maturity or whatever, that's just a problem waiting to happen.

And sometimes God's just blessing you by saying, you know, I'm not going to ask you to be the litter that this puppy relearns, you know, how to socialize on.

And so I think it's just wise to remember, broadly speaking, God is good and he's for you. And if this departure is happening, it's probably happening for good reasons that include his goodness for you, his goodness for your church, his goodness for the people leaving, and his goodness for the churches that they're going to.

[24 : 31] And, you know, that is just, as I said, above our pay grade. And at the end of the day, what will get you through this in a wise, calm way is high faith. Having faith in the God who loves you and who is able to turn all things and will turn all things for the good of those that love him and are called according to his purposes.

So there's a third thing I want to talk about with addition and subtraction. And that is, I believe that it is wise to remember Paul and the thorn in the flesh.

And in this situation, I can see this for me. And I don't mind being transparent because, to be honest, the way my life has played out, one of the basic values that I can give to the kingdom is transparency.

And so I'm going to just be transparent with you and say that I, as I pulled into the gym this morning, this was obviously on my mind. And I have to tell you, I do believe the Lord is doing a slight chastening on me in a kind, fatherly way with this particular departure.

There can be just slow, subtle, non-acute, sub-acute arising of pride, and you will not know it, and I will not know it.

[25 : 54] But when Paul saw the third heavens and God gave him the thorn in the flesh, it did not say because he had become conceited.

It was to keep him from becoming conceited. Here's the deal, my friends. You need to understand that God is going to chasten you more often if he loves you because he is actually eager to use you, and he can't and won't use the proud.

So not in a way that you want to be used anyway. So just remember that your pride is a problem. My pride is a problem. If it was a problem for Paul, it's definitely a problem for me. And while I don't think that I was walking in high-handed pride in this situation, I do believe that when I experience these setbacks, because this to me feels kind of, in my eyes, to be an institutional setback, but when he causes these things, I need to remember that God's committed to using me.

It's an indisputable fact at this point. It's just been too long, too many evidences of him using me. He's committed to using me, and that means he's not going to let me get proud because he will not use the proud in the way that we want to be used.

So sometimes there can be certain families that just specifically in this case, I can see this being potential in my heart. I could have felt some low, subacute pride over the fact that this high-powered family was listening to me and was at my church and so on and so forth.

[27 : 28] I'm not saying that I was ever really high-handed about it or really even that conscious about it, but it's easy to imagine that.

It's certainly also easy to imagine, just from a financial perspective, all of us have gone through the ups and downs on the financial side.

All of us have known what it's like to wonder, are we going to be able to pay the bills and so on and so forth? And it is true that sometimes certain families come to you and you feel like, wow, this has really made me feel more secure and so on and so forth.

And that can be a grace from the Lord. It can also sometimes not be something that he wants you to have indefinitely. So one of the headings under addition by subtraction is just remember, God does chasten you, the pastor.

He doesn't do that necessarily because he's angry with you in any respect. He is actually keeping you from pride and he will bring you through hard things just to keep you from becoming conceited.

[28 : 35] So that I think sometimes with certain families, when you lose them, you might want to ask, like, was this a family that is their departure making me feel less safe? Is their departure? You know, and it's probably like sometimes the answer is yes.

And it's like, well, what is God doing there? He's humbling me. He's making me more dependent on him. He's making me less self-sufficient and so forth. And then just generally, none of us like to lose any families.

We only want to add them. And the same thing applies. There can be some specific families that it stings more on. But generally speaking, all of us want bigger churches, right? And that's fine.

But when God pulls that away from you, it's important that you respond as a good son and trust your father and say, you know what you're doing.

And understand that there's a preventative kind of discipline that we fathers engage in all the time. And it's just common. And it's not because something's gone wrong exactly. It's to keep things from going wrong.

[29 : 30] And sometimes departures can do that for you. They can keep you a little humbler, a little more dependent on the Lord. And just remember that as much as you've worked to build up this thing and you've built this congregation and been diligent and worked really hard and worked lots of hours, it all comes from the Lord.

And he gives and he takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. So those are the two philosophical ideas I wanted to communicate to you. Firstly, when people leave, it is a threat to the underlying important sort of virtue of commitment in general.

And I do think you need to speak to that probably mostly in informal ways and with a soft spirit. But you do need to sort of push against that and say that's not okay in my opinion.

And we really will never be able to do anything if we all just leave when we have a new preference emerge. And this will explain some of why your – panic is probably too strong a word – but some of why your feelings are uneasy because you know that.

You're a shepherd. God put shepherd skills in you. You know, he uploaded them like in The Matrix. And so you know that. You know that this is kind of like a threat to the underlying thing that keeps you all together, which is a value of commitment.

[30 : 50] And so that's fine. Just be careful with that. Don't overplay it. And if you're not sure you can't overplay it, then just don't talk about it. Trust the Lord. The second philosophical issue is there are lots of good reasons why God is being good to you in taking someone away.

It could be that there's underlying theological disagreements that are going to really manifest in other ways later. It could just be because God has a particular sanctification plan that requires the shuffling of the sheep.

And it also could be just because he is caring for you. He's looking out for you. He doesn't want you to become a prideful butthole. And he's like, hey, remember, I'm in charge. And, you know, him taking things away isn't always discipline in a reactive way.

It can be discipline in a proactive way. Okay. So those are the philosophical things I wanted to communicate. Now I want to talk about how to look after yourself in these kinds of situations.

I think the first thing is just to understand that if you're a good pastor, this will have an emotional and physical toll on you. It is a good thing that you care when people leave. God knits these feelings in a pastor's heart, what I would call paternal feelings.

[32 : 01] And so when things don't go the way you want them to, either for an individual family or for your church as a whole, some of that can be good. And whether it's good or not, you need to understand you will have a reaction to this.

So that's just probably an inevitability. I want you to understand something I didn't understand is that that's physical. That's going to land on your body in some way.

It's just common for us shepherds. There's a physical toll to pastoring that no one ever talks about. Now, I didn't know about any of this.

I didn't have any of this kind of talk when I was coming up. Sorry, I had to take a Bellini break. So this all snuck up on me.

I had no concept of any of this. I don't think I had any concept that I had emotions, to be honest with you. I was just a clueless caveman pastor. Anyway, what you need to think about here is what's your body doing?

[33 : 03] How's your body reacting to this? Feeling offended or disrespected or sinned against or just afraid? And understand that your body's going to do something.

Now, you need to just be careful here to take care of your body in a way that is take care of your body and your mind. I'll talk about your mind here in a minute. And here's some thoughts about that.

This is typically, I want to talk a little bit about how pastors perceive energy, physical energy, emotional energy, and so forth. One of the things that you'll notice when you're really tired, it's been a hard bit, a hard stretch, is every new thing feels scary because every new thing can go wrong.

And you tend to view every new thing through a lens of pessimism because you begin to think like, well, if this goes wrong, then I'm going to have to take much more of this or that.

What you're doing subconsciously is like, think about it like if you're really poor and you're just looking at your car and you're looking at this or that and your family wants to take a road trip. And all you can think about is what if the transmission dies in the minivan or something.

[34 : 14] When you're really poor, that's kind of how you view life. Everything is just like another bill waiting to happen. And you're like, I don't have enough money to cover all the things that could happen. Well, when you're emotionally drained, this is going to be a part of experiencing new things in general.

Let me pause here. I'll get back to handling leaving. This is actually something you have to watch out for on the innovation side. You can be suspicious of new endeavors in your church because you just keep thinking about what could go wrong.

And you're thinking about that because it probably will, first of all. And secondly, something will probably go wrong. And secondly, you just almost feel like, I don't know if I can handle another thing. A dumb thing that happened recently was one of our leadership guys wanted to recognize graduates at our church.

And we've never done that before. It's a completely normal thing to do. We just had never done that. My first reaction, I kid you not, was, well, what happens when we forget somebody? Then I've got to handle all of the, and we will at some point.

And it might not even be our fault. Like they might just not have signed up and told us. What happens when we make the announcement of these four graduates? And there's a fifth one that we didn't remember. And then, you know, what happens when that person's hurt?

[35 : 32] And now I've got, you know, an extra meeting on my schedule to handle this hurt. And then, you know, is that hurt going to move on to other people that are close to them and so on and so forth? So I kid you not, like I was so tired at that moment that I was subconsciously budgeting for energy to such a degree that even this really dumb, simple, good thing was causing me to feel suspicious about it.

Because I was thinking through, you know, I just don't think I have enough energy to handle the parts when this goes wrong. And friends, like, that's ridiculous. That's going to keep me from being faithful and aggressive and hopeful in ministry.

So that's just generally, I'm just giving you a little insight. Generally, you have to understand that when you get to those situations, it's because you're just exhausted. And then when something bad happens like this, when someone leaves, it's just so quick.

It's just so easy to react to this sort of like catastrophizing of the amount of energy this is going to take. And you just don't feel like you have it to give and so forth.

It would be sort of like if you're really poor, you get in your car one day and the check engine light comes on. You're just like, I don't, I can't, I just can't. Well, here's where that hit me.

[36 : 47] Because if you're listening to this, you probably know me. You probably know I'm kind of fat. Well, let me tell you exactly what happened to me in my 20s and 30s. I went through all sorts of hard things. They're just normal, hard things, you know.

A lot of good came out of all of them, but they were all these sort of, especially when I was, you know, more emotionally immature, they just felt like 10. Everything felt like a 10. You know, every, this thing I'm going through now would have felt like a 10.

Absolutely, for sure. And so my body, I didn't know any of this about my body or bodies in general, but everything's about energy. Everything is always about energy.

It's always about how much energy you have to handle things. There's different kinds of energy. There's financial energy. There's physical energy. There's emotional energy. There's spiritual energy. But it's all basically just, you know, second law of thermodynamics.

It's all basic. It's all just like, okay, I got to move some stuff. And that moving that stuff doesn't come free. It's going to cost me. Well, for me in my 20s and 30s, I would instinctively do the kind of the most obvious thing, which was eat, sleep, eat and sleep.

[37 : 53] It would have been like when I felt low in energy, eat more, sleep more. And I wasn't thinking any of this. This is just instinct. But I thought, you know, I just had this subconscious level of like consume, consume, consume.

Consume more rest. Consume more food. Consume more food. And I didn't learn about myself until later that about 80% of the time when I'm feeling tired, it actually is that I'm not breathing well.

You'd be shocked by how much you're not breathing well when you're stressed. Well, your body's not getting enough oxygen. It could just be that your muscles need more blood in them, so forth.

Anyway, I figured out at some point that actually when you're feeling like you need energy, you actually have to, by faith, go expend energy and exercise to get more energy. And I know that seems weird, but it absolutely is true.

So over time, I've moved from eating and drinking and sleeping, you know, kind of ways of this. The drinking was just to sleep. But I've moved from that to, oh, I need to go exercise.

[39 : 04] And so actually now when things get hard, I move more. I have limits because of some injuries and some ongoing body things.

So I have figured out, you know, how to do that even. But, you know, I have a lot of muscle mass. I've lifted weights, you know, off and on for my whole adult life. And there are some things that I lean into.

I do a lot of walking and so forth. I've actually realized that when I'm under stress, that that emergency deficit, that energy deficit feeling I'm feeling is actually best resolved by taking really fundamental physical actions.

Not eating or sleeping, but like moving and then also building things, fixing things. You know, I'm somewhat handy. I can fix my car. I can build stuff.

But I've just learned I got to actually move more. So when you're dealing with someone that's leaving, you need to watch out for eating, drinking and sleeping. Well, I would say mostly are the three things.

[40 : 04] TV would just be sleeping with your eyes open, in my opinion. That kind of stuff. Understand that your body's like you don't want to be overly simplistic with this feeling of I can't do anything.

It's actually you need to energize your body with exercise, with good breathing and blood in your muscles and so on and so forth. I would say that generally speaking, you just need to acknowledge that sleep will likely be disrupted.

If you're a great sleeper, congratulations. I'm not saying you're less spiritual than me. But I think a lot of us understand that this is just a fact of life. And here I would just remind you that God knows what you need.

And don't view sleep as an entitlement. Don't view sleep as something that you have to hoard. If it's taken from you for a while, it'll be okay. Just don't overreact to not being able to sleep.

Try to get separate from your wife. We have a spare bedroom. The night that I heard that this family's leaving, I didn't sleep that night. I wasn't surprised by that. I wasn't taken aback by that. I just took it in stride.

[41 : 07] It wasn't a big deal. But I didn't want to mess with my wife's sleep either. So I just went in another room and just tossed and turned for 12 hours. Got up in the morning. Went and walked, you know, really a quick pace, four miles an hour.

And just put a ton of steps on my stepometer, you know, and just did what I knew I needed to do. And it was really helpful. So now, again, the subheading here is we're taking care of ourselves.

We're understanding what our body's going to do in reaction to these hard things. Generally speaking, I encourage you to move. Go do movement. It's not the right time to sit in front of the keyboard and write and then delete 15 versions of your response.

No, go move. Go do stuff. Now, emotionally, I think that there's what's important on the emotional side is that you start as quickly as possible categorizing your feelings into actionable categories.

So here's this most recent spat for me. This is here's some of the categories. I felt hurt, disrespected, used. And I kind of thought about that enough to see is that right.

[42 : 20] And I think it is. I think those are right. Right. And, you know, I sought some counsel on that and got feedback that, yeah, they could see that. So what do I do now with those feelings? Well, I've been sinned against.

Well, what does the Bible tell me to do when I'm sinned against? Well, now I've got a couple options. I can Matthew 18, this situation, or I can just see if I can just let it go and forbear and forgive on my own.

And both are options. And, you know, I typically will try a number, you know, to be forbearing and forgiving and just not mention it and see if I can. To me, that's a big deal. Can I just let go of this?

And hopefully I can. I think in this case I can. And if not, then I do need to go ahead and, you know, exercise Matthew 18. I just need to make the effort anyway to exercise Matthew 18.

Not every situation needs to terminate in church discipline and so forth. I think that the beginning there is just, you know, I want to gain that.

[43 : 16] Do I want to gain this brother or do I want to feel vindication for my, you guys know all this. Matthew 18 is not, I want someone to agree that I've been sinned against. Matthew 18 is, I'm not in fellowship with this person and I want to be in fellowship with this person.

And so I'm going to go to them and I want them to hear me. And then I think hearing doesn't always have to be that they see everything that you're saying.

I think sometimes hearing can just be, you know, I can see from your perspective how that's not great. And again, if I'm feeling hurt and disrespected, ideally in a situation like this, it'd be nice if I could just move on.

If I can't, I need to go to them. But I need to even there be happy for the lowest rung of sort of acknowledgement. And again, that's totally what someone would do if they're eager to move on.

When my wife sins against me, I'm not, I don't need her to get every detail of her repentance right. Why? I'm eager to move on. I'm eager to be in relationship with her.

[44 : 18] I'm just looking for enough of an understanding that I can be in relationship with her. And trust the Lord will, you know, unfold this further. So that's one category of feelings I was having.

And I need to do something with those, forgive and try to move on. And then there were other feelings I was having. There's just like, you know, anxiousness.

Like I'm anxious about how this is going to play out in my church and how this is going to play out in my life and so forth. So there's two principles for anxiousness.

The first is consistent prayer. Be anxious about nothing, but pray about everything. Cast your cares upon him for he cares for you. And then the other thing is I always say pray and pray on paper.

And analyze the actual reality of your anxieties. And I think you'll find often that you are catastrophizing things. I think this is another actual virtue of shepherding. It is absolutely your job to be able to think 15 steps ahead and to understand if this, then that, then this, then that, then this.

[45 : 26] And this is how that sheep dies under these five potential variables in the situation. That's good shepherding. That's good fathering. That's good husbanding. Just being a good leader. But you understand that like that can't be catastrophizing is wrong because it is disconnected from faith.

And you do have to be able to say, yeah, this could go wrong a bunch of ways. God is good. I can't overreact to this. So I like to pray on paper and just put down, this is what I'm worried about.

This is what I'm worried about will happen. And I think it gives me a little bit more perspective on like, well, I probably am reaching a little bit there. Like there's like six things that would have to go wrong. And yes, it's possible, but also God's in control and he loves me and so on and so forth.

I think the other thing that's good is just to understand that in these situations, guys, some of the anxiety you're feeling is just actually what it feels like to be a human being. There can be seasons of ministry where everything's going right and you're just winning.

And you develop an unreasonable sense of control, an illusion of control. And then when things go wrong, sometimes it's very similar to how I feel whenever I go like in the deep wilderness by myself.

[46 : 37] I realize like, man, I could die. There's 30 ways I could die right now. And I have to be really careful because I'm nothing right now in this environment. And I think there's like an anxiety that's associated almost like adjacent to awe.

And I think sometimes my anxiety just needs to be transferred to awe. And I just say, no, like, yeah, I'm nothing. I really don't have fundamental control. And like, this is all up to the Lord.

And, you know, just I think some anxiety just needs to be understood as I'm small. God's big. Moving on. Okay. One of the things I also wanted to speak about here is I think it's sort of inevitable that one of the feelings you'll feel in a situation like the one I'm describing is disrespect.

And I do believe that, again, I think that's probably a good feeling. I think you should expect to be respected. I think that's wise. I think that's how God writes his word concerning your role.

So I think it's reasonable to feel disrespected. I think it's biblical to feel disrespected. I think that we also clearly see that Jesus entrusted himself to God in those situations.

[47 : 43] And that it's okay for you to say, you know, I do feel disrespected. And I would like you, Lord, to vindicate me in your time and in your way. I also do think, though, that we have to, again, just check in on the humility side of things.

During my last exercise session, I was listening to Thomas Watson's book, The Art of Divine Contentment. And one of the things is that book, if you've ever read it, it's just like bumper sticker after bumper sticker after bumper sticker.

It's like it's ridiculous. It's one of the richest quote books you'll ever find. But he talks about at one point, he's like, you feel disrespected. He's like, just remember, if people could read your minds and see your heart, you'd be even less respected than you are now.

And that's a good thing to remember, too. So here I'm just talking about managing yourself, understand your body, probably need to spend energy on basic human motion rather than eat and sleep and drink.

Manage your feelings, understand what they are and what they are calling you to do. Is it to forgive? Is it to pray? Is it to actually plan, write stuff down on paper? And then when it comes to disrespect, understand like, yeah, you probably do deserve some more respect than, if nothing else, because of your position.

[48 : 57] But then understand also that that respect would totally not really deserve to you because of who you are. The reality, as Watson says, is if people saw you for who you really are, you'd get no respect.

Okay. And then the last thing related to taking care of yourself is sex. I think it's a huge means of grace during stressful seasons. I know we struggle in various denominational circles that I run in.

We do try to communicate this to wives. It's, you know, that's a tender kind of thing to talk about. The reality is, is that in my life, it has been a huge means of grace during stressful seasons, including a feeling of respect and wanting to be wanted and so forth.

I actually think it's a pretty big deal. I would say that don't be a wussy, whiny sex boy about this with your wife. Don't, you know, it may not even be necessary, ideally, to say, hey, I'm stressed, let's have sex.

It'd be better for you just to take her, quote unquote, in a godly way. That would be better at a number of levels. But if you do find that there's just a libido disconnect there, you know, at that point, I would go ahead and go to your wife and say, hey, one of the things that just would really help me is just like, could we just make it, put it on a schedule like every day for maybe a little while and just ask for a lot of sex?

[50 : 24] I do think that will actually help your body, your mind, all that stuff. I think that sex is a huge means of grace for pastors during stressful seasons.

Okay, so we've done some philosophical stuff, some how to help yourself stuff. And let's talk about just a general template for having, you know, that concluding conversation with departing members.

First thing I would say is, is that I do not believe it is useful to try to convince people to change their minds in the situation that I'm talking about here.

I have no interest in doing that. I believe this is from the Lord. I believe that this will wind up being good for all involved. I don't see all of that perfectly, but I really do have a sense that this is this is of the Lord and good.

So I don't I'm not going into this to try to win something. I'm actually mostly just going into this to try to fulfill the obligations I have as a pastor. And that's that's really what I would encourage you to understand in this last pit bit is if you.

[51 : 37] Sorry, Bellini break. If you rehearse. Vindictive.

Retorts in, you know, your brain can get into these cycles where you're sort of vindicating yourself in your own mind and what you would say if you could say this or that. So don't do any of that.

It's not going to help you at all. It's going to actually affect your tone, your body language, and probably your words later on because your words come from your heart. So don't go into this thinking, I want to vindicate myself or whatever, or I want to show this person they're wrong or so whatever.

Go into this with the fear of the Lord. Acts 20, Paul is motivated in his care for the Ephesian elders by his fear of the Lord. Day and I did not cease to admonish you with tears. I am innocent of your blood.

Like it was it was him unto the Lord. And so at this point in the situation, when someone has just told you we're leaving. Your concern needs to be pleasing the Lord, not not arguing your points.

[52 : 42] So that's how generally you need to frame this concluding chapter in the situation is what does the Lord want me to do? And I do think there are things that he wants you to do.

I'm going to just give you the process that I would recommend and then you change this according to how you need to or what you think and your situation. But I think that generally speaking, whether you do this via email or in person, I can see benefits to both, by the way.

Real quickly, if it's in person for someone like me who has kind of a loud voice, I'm a big guy. I can often get slandered, I think, unfairly for being domineering when it's not domineering at all.

It's just certitude. It's just confidence in what I believe. But I definitely am wise enough now to generally not go to conversations that could potentially be hostile alone.

So if you are someone like me who maybe somewhat deservedly, well, somewhat deservedly, I got to be honest, and somewhat undeservedly would potentially get slandered as a mean guy, don't go by yourself.

[53 : 51] It's just don't set yourself up like that. Take somebody else as a witness to the conversation. They don't have to contribute. Just take somebody else. So what I would do is I'd say, what does God want me to do?

I'm going to talk about some things I think God wants you to do. And what I'd start with is just respond to the person by saying, thank you for letting me know. I would like to have a final conversation with you. Would you like to do that in person or via email?

I just have some things that I think I need to do to fulfill my responsibility unto the Lord, who was at least for a time entrusted with your care. Something like that. I think a big thing to just explain to them, I'm not here to change your mind.

I'm actually really just trying to do what God would have me to do. Would you be okay with letting me do that? At that point, if they say no, then you're off the hook.

You don't have any more responsibility to the Lord. Unless you think you need to do church discipline or something. I'm not going to get into that in this conversation. Generally speaking, if someone declines to talk to you, then you're probably off the hook.

[54 : 54] Okay. What do you do? Well, attitudinally, it's unto the Lord. It's just great commandment stuff. It's love the Lord. You have responsibilities to Him. And then I would say the way practically to frame it is to love your neighbor, specifically the next church they go to, and the next pastor they connect to at that church.

So what I think this is, the heart here is, God, what do you want me to do? And basically, broadly speaking, God wants you to be kind to the next church, be kind to the next pastor.

So that's kind of how I would, that's attitudinally how I would frame this. First question I think is the most efficient, and it could potentially just get you further down the road, is I would just ask, what church do you plan on attending?

Most of us that would be listening to this have similar church covenants that we encourage early, you know, we require members to recite or at least commit to. And most of our church covenants have some language toward the end, typically.

If I leave this place, I will go to another church of like faith or so on and so forth. I would recommend that if you don't have language like that in your church covenant, you include it, and that you write that language in such a way that it sort of really emphasizes like faith.

[56 : 16] And probably be a little bit more specific than that. You don't want to be too specific. It'll just sound weird. It'll just look weird. But that like faith thing is key, and I'll get to that in a little bit.

So first question, what church are you going to, and what do you like about it? And this is going to just expose some of what, some of the differences, what they're seeking, what you did not provide.

This is good information for you. Down the road, you may receive enough feedback where you realize, I think in order for us to serve these people, we, in order to serve people, we really should consider being more like X, Y, or Z church.

So it's good for you to get that information. It can also just have a more hopeful tone to the conversation of, I've essentially saying that you've surrendered. Like, I'm not trying to talk you out of this.

I sometimes will just tell people, listen, I'm not trying to change your mind. I'm just trying to be honest with the Lord or fulfill my responsibility to the Lord. And so ask what church they're going to.

[57 : 23] You don't necessarily, unless it's just a great church, you know, you may be able to just commend it then and be happy. Truth is, is that I'm in a situation where I've not been in a long time, where in my community, there's probably three or four churches where if people leave, and this happens a lot, people will leave those churches to come to my church, or people will leave my church to come to those churches.

And it's generally just like all of us pastors are kind of like low-key okay with it. We're not really competing. We kind of see, you know, we're all the kind of the same in many respects.

There's differences for sure. But there's definitely some churches where I would just be like, oh, okay, sounds good. The next step is I would tell them, hey, I know this is new for you.

You're probably not used to leaving churches, so forth. But for me, this is something that I deal with quite a bit. And I just understand that the questions I'm asking you are not rooted in suspicion of you.

But just please understand that I've gone through so many of these that are presented one way and then turn out to be a second way. And so I'd just like to ask you two questions related to that just to make sure I'm okay fulfilling what God has called me to do.

[58 : 38] The first one is I just want to make sure there's nothing deeply scandalous or dark going on behind the scenes. I've had situations where people have fled our church because they wanted different worship music.

That's what they said. When in reality, there was domestic abuse happening. You know, like people lie. People lie intentionally. People lie accidentally. So I would just say, like, is there anything that's like really scandalous?

That's like any kind of really dark thing that might be happening where you're fleeing the light in general? The basic deal there is you just want to make sure the devil is not stealing a sheep from you.

You're the shepherd, man. And you just want to make sure that the devil is not stealing a sheep from you to take them into like bad things, right?

So you might get some indication of that when you ask what church you're going to, because if it's like an affirming church or something like that, well, that's interesting. But secondly, just ask some question about, hey, is there something really dark going on?

[59 : 38] Is there anything like that? They will pretty much always say no. But if there is something, the Lord might use that question in interesting ways, and I've seen that happen as well. So I'd say, is there anything you're fleeing?

Is there any light you're fleeing? Something like that. And explain to them again that, hey, I'm not saying this because I see something. I'm just saying this because this is, the truth is, man, like this is your first time leaving a church or whatever, you know, relatively.

But I've had so many people leave over the years, and sometimes it's just totally misrepresented. So I'm not accusing you of that. I just want to make sure, is there some darkness, you know, causing you to flee the light?

The second is something similar, but it's a little different. And that is just like, hey, are you sure that you've told me everything, all the concerns you have about, you know, for me, Providence? Are you sure you've told me all the concerns you have?

And just explain. Again, I'm not saying you'll do this, but sometimes people leave, and then later on in their conversations with church members and so forth, additional complaints are made.

[60 : 40] And I just want to know, are there other issues that I need to be thinking about? Would you have me think about anything else? And so on and so forth. So now you've asked three questions. What church are you going to? Is there anything, like, really bad going on that is causing you to flee the light?

Any hidden sins and so forth? Third, is there anything else, any other complaint that you would have that you haven't shared with me that might come out later?

This is good because, especially if you have a friend or if it's in writing, this will be helpful for you if later on, and it happens all the time, guys, you know this. They leave and then other complaints surface later. It's good to have this step checked off.

It will wind up helping you down the road. Now, finally, this one I don't have a ton of time to give you extreme detail on, but you would probably want to circle back at this point to this next church.

Because what you're really trying to do, remember, is you're trying to be a blessing to the kingdom at large. You're trying to send this person out in a good state to that next church. Ideally, that church is something that you can at least tacitly agree to as fitting sort of the broad definition of church.

[61 : 49] It's okay for you to think your church is the best church in town. I think my church is the best church in town, but I don't require everybody to think that, right?

That's a subjective opinion. I would argue I would be able to make points why I think that my church is the best church in town. I've worked really hard to make my church under the Lord's effort, under the Lord's anointing, to do what I could to make this church the best church in town.

But you might think that. It doesn't mean that they can't think otherwise. And so if you can just tacitly say that you're going to a church that fits within the basic broad definition of a church of like faith, then I would just say, just commend them to the Lord and say, that's great.

If you can't do that, then I would go ahead and say, I'll have to think more about that church. But thanks for letting me know. And then I would probably just wrap up the conversation.

If it's a bad church, I would want to reload. I would want to go back to my team, my plurality of elders. Hopefully you have them. Or I'd want to consult some other guys that I trust wisdom-wise.

[63 : 03] Because if you're in a situation where someone's going to a really bad church, it's probably your obligation to just give them like a really good letter explaining, giving this family a really good letter explaining why you strongly disagree with that move.

But that would be, I would not do that in this conversation. And I would give that some time for you to prayerfully think about it and so forth. Don't overreact. Don't, you know, I'm as Baptist as they come in terms of the sacraments.

If someone leaves my church to go to a paedo-baptist church, I ain't loving it. But it is not, it does not reach the threshold of me being hard on them. It just doesn't.

So don't overreact. Don't be too picky about the theological nuances of your church and their church. But, you know, if it meets the standard of threshold of faithfulness, you got to send them on their way.

That's my opinion. And if it doesn't, then I would end the conversation politely and then say, hey, I want to look more into that church. And I just, thanks for your time. I might send you another letter, but thank you for meeting with me.

[64 : 08] Assuming that it's a reasonable church that you can commend or, you know, that you can let them go to, here's where I would kind of say is the one place you have to offer a slight critique.

I would tell them, ideally, it doesn't happen all the time, but ideally, the pastor of this church would call me and ask what I think of you and whether I would recommend you for membership.

Here I would just say, like in this particular situation, again, I think this situation I'm talking about that I'm dealing with is pretty common in this one area. They made the decision without ever talking to you or any other pastors.

And I would just, in this situation, I plan on just saying, yeah, you know, if your future pastor calls me and asks what I think, I'd say, I'd gladly commend this family to you.

They've been a blessing. I appreciated, you know, so much of their time here. I love them. I'm eager for them to continue to grow in grace and so forth. You're telling this family that you're saying goodbye to these things.

[65 : 06] And then I would say, but I would also say that I was not consulted, nor were any of the other pastors before they made their decision. And I just would want to let the new pastor know that about you, Bob and Jill, because I think that you'll find that that would be the expectation of most good churches, that decisions like these would have been run by the pastors before having been made.

Again, watch your tone. I'm going to talk about gentleness in a minute. Watch your tone there. But I do think it'd be appropriate for you to let them know that you disagree with that and let them know they're free to disagree with you, but that in this one area, you would offer a slight critique and that you would let them know that so that if nothing else, maybe next time they would do that well.

And, you know, and if they push back on you, you might even be able to say, well, I'll tell you this, before you join this new church, why don't you just ask the pastor, pastor, if we wanted to leave, would you expect us to consult with you before we made that decision?

They'll have a fun time going around to find the one pastor who'll say, oh, no, no, you don't need to talk to me before you leave. It's no big deal. So I'd say all this with some confidence just because I know this is like so common.

I know enough pastors where this is common. So if you wanted to just say when the pastor asked about you, if he were to call me and say, would you recommend this family?

[66 : 40] I would say yes with this caveat. I just want you to know about this and just say, you know, listen, you don't have to agree with that, but that's what I would say. You just need to have some balls, you know, some level of conviction and just say, you know, I'm not going to tell you everything you're doing wrong, but I'm also not going to just like, you know, completely cover up some basic disagreements.

This is where self-differentiation. And if you've read some of the emotional sabotage that Joe Rigney's put out, some of that stuff, you understand, like you got to hold your ground. You don't have to be a jerk about it, but there's places where you kind of hold your ground.

Okay. Now I want to talk about gentleness because over all of this, it gentleness is key. And then after I'm done talking about gentleness, I'll just talk about the last thing to do after they've left.

And that's more of taking care of yourself. Here's the deal with gentleness. I've really struggled for a long time. I don't do well with logic glitches. And when I detect them rather than resolve them, I tend to run away from them.

So I've heard so much gaslighting and so much false equivalencies and just wrong ideas about gentleness. And so I was a person who was not very gentle, but I would hear all the talk about gentleness.

[67 : 55] It was manifestly untrue. And so rather than say, well, what is true for a long time, I was just like, well, that guy's wrong. He's wrong about gentleness. And gentleness typically gets played against truthfulness or played against conviction or leadership or something like that.

And it just never landed right. One of the reasons is I cut my teeth spiritually on systematic theology, explicitly the indivisible nature of the inseparable nature of God's attributes.

And I just don't like any conversation where God is said to be gentle in one case and not gentle in another. And so then you go to the Bible and you see all these places where you don't think God's being very gentle.

And all the explanations for that were just sketchy to me. And then I thought, well, let's use Jesus. Maybe there's some God-man distinctions here.

Let's use Jesus as a better analysis. And now you got Jesus calling people tombs and whitewashed tombs and flipping over tables and so forth. And I just was like, I don't know what gentleness is, but I know that I'm not okay with saying that Jesus was sometimes not gentle.

[69 : 04] And these behaviors he did were gentle because Jesus did them. I don't know if I'm doing a good job explaining that. Anyway, so I wound up really taking a long time to finally figure this out.

And here's how I landed on it. And I have pretty deep theological convictions that I'm right. But here's my opinion. I think that gentleness is the bare amount of force needed to do a job.

I think that's what gentleness is. The bare amount of force needed to do a job. And this changed my life because it made me realize that of all the times I would leave a conversation thinking I had said too much, I wasn't being gentle.

Gentleness, if you exercise gentleness, you'll leave conversations. Pretty routinely thinking you didn't say enough. Here's a good example of this. As a bigger guy, I have broken off a few spark plugs in cars over the years.

And I just used too much force. I've broken a lot of things by using too much force too soon. And I didn't understand how much force was needed to do the job. And there's really no way to know that, by the way.

[70 : 10] That's actually why torque wrenches are helpful, mechanically speaking. There's actually no way going into a conversation with someone, an edifying, exhorting, admonishment type conversation. There's actually no way of knowing what the minimum amount of force is necessary.

So all you really can do is start small and build up progressively in the conversation or through a series of conversations until you've said enough to cause some movement.

The truth is, is that the Holy Spirit's really faithful and he will use very little wrench turn to actually loosen lots of spiritual bolts. But the person who doesn't understand gentleness never gets there.

They're just cranking everything. So for me, gentleness is best modeled and understood as the bare minimum amount of force needed to do the job, which means I come in soft and I slowly add more and more force until I feel like either A, that should be enough force I'm not willing to do anymore and it will break, or B, the thing has moved.

And very often that means that I will wind up, like I said, nowadays leaving a conversation thinking I should have said more than I did, didn't work. But you know what? That's okay because I still have that relationship.

[71 : 23] I can still go back and do the thing and say it harder and say it more specifically and so forth. So all of this needs to be understood in that context. Like you, in theory, have plenty of time.

If these people walk away from you and they're like, we're done talking to you, that's on them. But in theory, you should be giving yourself enough time to handle all this in a way that allows you to apply small force a little bit more, a little bit more, a little bit more, a little bit more, and not have to come in and slam all of this down anyone's throat.

So I would encourage you to understand. Now, there can be times when God will give you insight and say, this person needs to be both guns blazing. Like, that's what they need.

That's what this situation is calling for. Well, the problem is, is that until you learn gentleness, that's, you will always think every situation calls for that. But then when you start walking in gentleness for years, you realize, no, actually very few situations call for that.

Some do. I still know how to do that. I still know how to show my teeth. But also, a lot of them don't. So as you're dealing with these people, gentleness is huge.

[72 : 34] You know, it's just a huge skill. The bare minimum amount of force needed to do the job. Okay. Now, concluding. They're gone. Going back to the very first thing I said about the philosophical issues, one thing that's going to happen is you're going to talk to other people.

People are going to ask you, I think it's fair to say they left for this reason. I was not told about their decision until after they left. And I don't agree with that. I think you can say that in different ways for different people.

Some people can handle that being said, just like I said it. Some people need it to be hinted at. Be shrewd. But I do believe it's wise for you to communicate to other people, to frame this in a godly way, in a biblical way.

Because of this idea that quitting is contagious, I do believe you do need to have some sense of how you're going to talk about this to other people. And I do believe that you have authority as the pastor to frame the action of your people in a way that is, as far as you can tell, not your opinion, but actually biblical.

But I'm mostly concerned about you privately. After this has happened, let's be sure that we know what we're doing to deal with this afterward. And here's what I would tell you.

[73 : 44] I believe that generally speaking, when someone leaves in a way that is sinful, even when it's accidentally sinful, I do believe that some imprecatory prayer is appropriate.

I believe that it's appropriate for you to ask the Lord to chasten that person and help them to grow so that they don't do this to other people, so that they will grow in their commitment level.

And growing in their commitment level, they will get more grace and more shalom and more goodness. I think it's totally appropriate for you to do that. Here's what I would suggest. I'd say, put them on your prayer list for a month, and only a month, and just be like, I'm just going to pray for them for a month.

And then I would ask that God, you know, I would ask God to vindicate you to some degree. I would ask God to, you know, discipline them in some way that they would grow.

But here's the deal with that. You are called by Jesus to use the amount of judging force on others that you would like being used on you.

[74 : 46] So if you're going to pray that God chastens them because they've made a dumb mistake and they kind of got over their skis and they were emotionally immature, whatever, you can do that. I think maybe you should do that.

I think you probably should do that. I think it'd be good for you to do that. Psalm seems to really commend that kind of praying. But just remember, like, don't ask God to torch them for sins that are at a level of sins that you have in your own life right now.

And honestly, you don't want God and God hasn't been hard on you. And so you can pray light and precatations. I know that's not, you don't see that a lot, but you can pray prayers of like, this is not, this is not a life or death issue.

It just, but they did do me wrong. They did do the church wrong. They did cause me trouble. And Lord, you know, you've been kind to me when I've been an idiot. I want you to be kind to them, but I do, I do ask that you would correct them.

And so I would just give yourself a month to pray those prayers, because I think that there is a necessity for you to kind of gain some sort of theological closure on this and understand what category that person's in.

[75 : 51] And the person's basically in the category of their brother or sister in Christ. I love them. I will see them. I will be happy when I see them. Um, but I also do see some things that aren't okay.

And I do ask as their former pastor, Lord, I'd continue to ask that you'd bless them and lead them into the light. Okay. So that's all I've got on the subject. And, you know, yeah, it is kind of specific because it's dealing with a particular kind of leaving, but also a lot of this applies to a much broader category as well.

I hope that was helpful to you. And, you know, because you were listening to this, you already know me. So reach out if you have thoughts or disagreements or want clarification on something. And then I'm going to work, you know, a couple of weeks, I'm working on this financial thing.

I'm actually trying to make a book out of this, you know, finished by next year. But I can share the content there. I think it'll be really encouraging. That will give you like a real sharp, firm conscience on how to help your people be generous.

All right, man. Love you guys. Thanks so much for indulging in this. I hope this was helpful. May God bless you. And bless your ministry. And bless your family. Bless you and your wife as you seek to walk with him.