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Shepherds, Not CEOs

The True Role of a Pastor

“This is what the LORD says: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, ...”

— Jeremiah 6:16

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Executive Summary

The pastor described in the New Testament is a shepherd. He is known by his sheep, present among them, feeds them with the word of God, defends them from wolves, and is accountable to the Chief Shepherd whose flock the church actually is. The modern Western evangelical church, across the past four decades, has substantially traded this office for the role of corporate executive. The pastor has been re-cast as visionary, brand custodian, communicator, fundraiser, and platform owner. None of these categories appears in the apostolic writings. Each one quietly displaces something Scripture explicitly commands.

This paper makes its case in three parts. Part I sets out the New Testament portrait of the shepherd from Ezekiel 34, John 10, Acts 20, 1 Peter 5, and the example of Christ Himself, and names the pastoral fruit that flows from the office held in its biblical form. Part II diagnoses the CEO-pastor model: its origins in the late-twentieth-century absorption of corporate management theory, its operational logic, the metrics by which it has displaced apostolic measures, and the documented public failures by which the model has been empirically falsified. Part III identifies the recovery now underway across college campuses and local churches in the United States and beyond — a multi-generation pattern in which Gen Z carries the front line of evangelism and worship, Millennials run alongside as peer-aged disciplers, and Gen X and older saints anchor from the periphery. This pattern is, in effect, a matured form of what the Jesus People movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s recovered partially and lost. The recovery this time is being given the layer that movement most lacked.

The pastor was given a flock to feed and a Chief Shepherd to whom he must give account. Every other job description is a substitution.

The argument of this paper is that the CEO frame is not a neutral cultural adaptation of the pastoral office but a structural distortion whose fruit has, by its own scale of public collapse, now made the case against itself. The argument is also that the recovery of the apostolic shepherd is not theoretical. It is happening, observably, in the present moment. The remainder of this paper sets out the evidence and draws the conclusions that follow from it.

PART I

THE TRUE SHEPHERD

1. The Shepherd in Scripture

The image of God as Shepherd is one of the oldest and most consistent self-descriptions in Scripture. Jacob blessed his sons in the language of “the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel” (Genesis 49:24). David, who had carried lambs in the wilderness of Bethlehem, opened the twenty-third Psalm with “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1). Asaph addressed God as “Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock” (Psalm 80:1). Isaiah promised that the LORD “will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young” (Isaiah 40:11). The vocabulary is not decorative. It is the King’s chosen self-description of how He relates to His own people, and every later under-shepherd is called into a derivative of that same shape.

In the fullness of time, the Shepherd of Israel walked among His own sheep in human flesh and identified Himself with the title directly. “I am the good shepherd,” Jesus said. “The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

“I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.” — John 10:14-15, NKJV

Three marks define the true shepherd in this passage, and every legitimate under-shepherd through history has borne them in derivative form. The shepherd knows the sheep. The sheep know him. He lays down his life for them. Jesus contrasted the shepherd with the hireling — a man for whom the sheep are not his own and who flees when the wolf comes (John 10:12-13). The hireling is not necessarily a wicked man. He is a man for whom the flock is a job. The shepherd stays because the sheep are not his employment; they are his charge from the Chief Shepherd.

2. The Apostolic Charge

Two New Testament passages function as the formal job description of the pastoral office. Both were written by men who would shortly die for what they were teaching. The weight of last words is on every line.

In Acts 20, on his way to Jerusalem and almost certainly to chains, the apostle Paul gathered the elders of the church at Ephesus and gave them his final charge.

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” — Acts 20:28-30, NKJV

Six elements bind these verses together. The elder must take heed to himself before he can take heed to the flock. The office is plural — elders, not an elder. The office is given by the Holy Spirit. The work is shepherding. The church is owned by Christ at the price of His own blood. And the wolves are real, both from outside the body and from within — men who will rise up to draw away disciples after themselves. That last phrase deserves specific attention. It is, with prophetic precision, the description of what celebrity ministry produces: disciples drawn after a man rather than after Christ. Paul names this pattern in Acts 20 as a wolf-act, even when the man performing it is one of the elders.

Peter, writing as one who had himself been re-commissioned by Christ to feed the sheep on a Galilean beach (John 21:15-17), addressed elders with the same vocabulary.

“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” — 1 Peter 5:2-4, NKJV

Peter writes as a fellow elder, not from a tier above. The work must be entered willingly, not for dishonest gain, and not as lording over those entrusted to the elder’s care. The flock has been entrusted by Another. The under-shepherd will be examined. The crown is given by the Chief Shepherd alone. This is the eschatological frame of the office, and it constrains every other consideration that might press upon a pastor in his work.

3. The Self-Indicting Word of Ezekiel 34

If John 10 is the portrait of the true Shepherd, Ezekiel 34 is the portrait of the false. There is no sharper rebuke in all Scripture against a leadership class that has fed itself on the very people it was sent to feed.

“Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them.” — Ezekiel 34:2-4, NKJV

Each clause is a particular failure: feeding themselves rather than the flock, eating the fat, wearing the wool, refusing to strengthen the weak, refusing to heal the sick, refusing to bind up the broken, refusing to seek the lost, ruling with force rather than tender care. The Lord’s response is decisive: “Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand... I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them” (Ezekiel 34:9-10). Faithful pastoral ministry is constrained by this passage in every generation. Where any of these failures is present — where the office is held for personal gain, status, or platform — the indictment is direct.

4. The Fruit of Faithful Shepherding

The New Testament does not describe the pastoral office only in terms of duty. It also describes the observable fruit that follows when the office is held faithfully. Five marks are consistent across the apostolic writings, and where they are present, the office is being carried in its biblical form.

The first is saints equipped for the work of ministry. Ephesians 4:11-12 fixes the purpose of the pastoral gift: it was given “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” The pastor is not the minister of the church; the pastor is the equipper of the ministers, and the ministers are the saints. A church in which the saints are progressively trained, sent, and active in their gifting is a church being pastored well. A church in which the saints are perpetually retained as audience, however polished the audience experience, has not yet seen Ephesians 4 carried out.

The second is the body built up in love. “From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16). The fruit of faithful pastoring is not measured by the leader’s reach but by the body’s mutual life. Every joint supplies. Every part does its share. The shepherd does not produce this by force; he creates the conditions in which the body matures into it.

The third is disciples made. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) does not commission the church to make attenders. It commissions the church to make disciples — men and women who learn to obey all that Christ commanded. Faithful shepherding produces obedient followers of Christ, not satisfied consumers of religious content. The metric is not auditorium attendance but the number of believers who are themselves discipling others.

The fourth is the weak strengthened, the sick healed, the broken bound up, the lost sought (Ezekiel 34:4, 16). The negative form of this list is the indictment of the false shepherds; the positive form is the working description of the true ones. Where pastoral office is held faithfully, the visible activity of the church bends toward the people most easily neglected by an audience-centered structure: those whose suffering does not translate to platform growth.

The fifth is plural eldership rising up over time. “Appoint elders in every city as I commanded you” (Titus 1:5). A faithful shepherd raises up other shepherds. He multiplies the office rather than

monopolizing it. He prepares men of character, distributed across the body, who can hold the office plurally with him and after him. The pastor whose ministry produces no successors has not yet finished the apostolic work.

The fruit of faithful shepherding is a body that grows up into Christ. The fruit of executive leadership is an audience that grows around a man. The two cannot be confused once they have been observed side by side.

PART II

THE PASTOR AS CEO

5. The Origin of the CEO-Pastor Model

The pastoral office did not arrive at its current shape in a single step. It moved by stages — the early consolidation of authority around the bishop in the second and third centuries, the medieval fusion of pastoral office with political power, the Reformation’s recovery of the Word that nonetheless preserved the singular leader at the front of the room, and the modern professionalization of the pastorate around seminary credentialing and salaried placement. These earlier shifts are documented at length in the historical literature and need not be retraced here. The decisive recent shift, distinctive to the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, is different in kind from any of its predecessors. It is the wholesale importation of corporate management theory into pastoral theology.

The intellectual genealogy is well documented. Peter Drucker, the most influential management thinker of the twentieth century, began consulting with Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church in the late 1980s and continued into the 1990s, helping shape what became the Willow Creek Association and the global megachurch leadership movement. Drucker’s frameworks — mission, vision, strategy, structure, leadership pipeline, customer focus, performance metrics — were absorbed into evangelical leadership theory through Hybels’s books, conferences, and the annual Global Leadership Summit. Rick Warren’s Saddleback Church and his 1995 *The Purpose Driven Church* codified a similar synthesis from a Southern Baptist direction. By the early 2000s, the Drucker–Hybels–Warren stream had been absorbed into denominational leadership training, seminary courses on church administration, and the operating assumptions of thousands of mid-sized congregations imitating the model. The shift was open, named, and celebrated. Pastors were taught to lead like CEOs because the dominant evangelical leadership culture told them this was now the office.

The framework solved real operational problems: undermanaged staff, unclear mission, declining participation. But the framework also did something its architects did not foresee. It assigned the pastor a role profile drawn from the executive class — with executive metrics and executive expectations — without first asking whether Scripture had already assigned the pastor a different role, with different metrics, that the executive frame could not contain. Once the pastor was a CEO, the church had to be an organization. Once the church was an organization, the saints became its participants: customers, volunteers, donors. The work of ministry shifted from the saints to the staff. Ephesians 4:11-12 was, at the root of the new architecture, quietly inverted.

6. What the CEO Frame Imports

Six categories of work entered the pastoral office through the CEO frame, and each sits in tension with the apostolic charge.

- Vision-casting. The pastor is asked to define a future state for the organization and rally the congregation behind it. Scripture instructs pastors to feed sheep on the King’s already-revealed word, not to generate institutional vision.
- Strategic leadership. The pastor is asked to choose among possible directions for the church’s growth. Scripture has already named the strategy: make disciples, equip saints, plant churches, send laborers.
- Brand custodianship. The pastor is asked to protect the public reputation of the church and of his own teaching ministry. Scripture knows nothing of a pastoral brand and warns repeatedly against the desire for preeminence (3 John 9-10; Matthew 23:5-12).
- Fundraising. The pastor is asked to build the financial base for institutional vision. Scripture asks the pastor to live above suspicion in his handling of money, not to specialize in raising it.
- Communication. The pastor is asked to master public oratorical and digital arts that hold an audience. Scripture’s communication standard is plainness, faithfulness to the text, and refusal of “persuasive words of human wisdom” (1 Corinthians 2:4).
- Platform ownership. The pastor is asked to build a personal following beyond the local flock through books, conferences, and digital channels. Scripture knows no category for a pastoral platform that competes with the local body for the pastor’s heart and time.

Each category has a respectable cousin in the apostolic office. Vision-casting parodies teaching the people the King’s revealed will. Strategic leadership parodies wise oversight in a particular flock. Brand custodianship parodies the legitimate concern for a blameless reputation. Fundraising parodies the legitimate teaching on stewardship. Communication parodies the legitimate gift of teaching. Platform parodies the legitimate apostolic burden for many churches. The drift in each case is from a New Testament shape to its corporate counterfeit. The counterfeit, once accepted, hollows out the original.

7. The Metrics That Replace the Sheep

A profession is shaped by what it measures. The CEO frame measures attendance, giving, programs launched, staff hired, square footage built, online reach, social engagement, and brand recognition. Each of these is observable, quantifiable, and reportable. None of them is the metric the New Testament names. The apostolic measures are saints equipped (Ephesians 4:12), the body built up in love (Ephesians 4:16), disciples made (Matthew 28:19), the lost sought, the weak strengthened, the broken bound up (Ezekiel 34:4, 16), and elders raised up (Titus 1:5). These are slow, qualitative, embedded measures. They cannot be reported in a quarterly board meeting.

They will not show up on a pastor's annual review. They will not appear in the conference brochure that decides which pastor speaks next.

The result is a structural pressure that operates on every pastor inside the CEO frame, regardless of his personal intentions. He begins to optimize for what is measured. The apostolic measures fade from his calendar. The CEO measures crowd them out. Over time he becomes a man who has done what the structure asked. Ezekiel 34 does not ask the same questions, and the eventual examination will not be conducted by the structure that shaped him.

What the structure measures, the structure produces. A church that measures attendance produces attendance. A church that measures equipping produces equipped saints.

8. The Empirical Falsification: The Celebrity Collapse Cycle

The clearest evidence that the CEO frame has hollowed out the pastoral office is the modern celebrity collapse cycle. Across the past four decades, a documented sequence of the most platformed pastors in the English-speaking evangelical world have fallen, often spectacularly, often after years of unaddressed warning signs, and often with patterns of leadership abuse, financial impropriety, sexual sin, doctrinal manipulation, or some combination of these. The names are public record: Jim Bakker (1987), Jimmy Swaggart (1988), Ted Haggard (2006), Bill Hybels (2018, with the Willow Creek Independent Advisory Group report of 2019 finding the accusations against him credible), Mark Driscoll (2014, resignation from Mars Hill Church amid charges of bullying, plagiarism, and financial irregularities, the church itself dissolved), James MacDonald (2019, fired from Harvest Bible Chapel after years of authoritarian leadership), Carl Lentz (2020, dismissed from Hillsong NYC, in the broader collapse of Hillsong's global executive leadership documented across 2021–2023), and Ravi Zacharias (the posthumous independent investigation by Miller & Martin in February 2021 commissioned by his own ministry concluded that he had engaged in sexual misconduct over many years) and many others.

The Style and Voice Guide of this institute names individuals only where they constitute documented public evidence of a structural pattern. The argument here is not that these men were uniquely wicked. The argument is that the structure most of them operated within — solo senior pastor, large platform, weak or co-opted plural eldership, brand identity built around the man, financial dependence of the institution on his continued public presence — is exactly the structure the New Testament does not describe and exactly the structure that, by its own physics, removes the protections the sheep need. The collapses are not a series of unrelated personal tragedies. They are the predictable fruit of a re-shaped office.

Independent investigations into Mars Hill, Willow Creek, Hillsong, Harvest, and Ravi Zacharias International Ministries have together produced thousands of pages of reporting and the

testimonies of hundreds of victims, staff members, and congregants. Christianity Today's podcast The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill (Mike Cosper, host, 2021–2022) examined the Mars Hill case at length; The Roys Report has provided ongoing investigative coverage of multiple cases. The pattern reported across these investigations is consistent: a charismatic solo leader, a board structurally insulated from challenging him, a brand identity that made his removal feel existentially threatening to the institution, a culture in which raising concerns was treated as disloyalty, and a long period of staff and congregational pain before public exposure forced the institution's hand. This is the pattern apostolic plural eldership was designed to prevent. The CEO frame removes the prevention by design.

The CEO-pastor model has been empirically falsified by its own most prominent practitioners. The collapses are not anomalies in an otherwise sound system. They are the system's own documented output. The structure produces what the structure is built to produce.

PART III

THE MULTI-GENERATION MODEL

9. What Is Happening on the Campuses

Across the United States, in the years 2023 through 2026, an unmistakable spiritual movement is emerging on college campuses, in dorm rooms, in fraternity and sorority houses, in collegiate athletic facilities, and in the apartments and workplaces that surround them. The movement is concentrated in the youngest cohort of the church — Generation Z, born roughly between 1997 and 2012. It does not, in its present form, run through the dominant institutional structures of the Western evangelical church. It runs through the network of campus ministries, peer-led Bible studies, athlete-organized prayer groups, and student-initiated worship gatherings that the church-growth industry of the past forty years did not predict, design, or authorize. The empirical evidence is now substantial.

9.1 The Documentary Record

The Salt Company, a campus ministry network rooted in Iowa State University, reported attendance growth from approximately 1,400 students in 2023 to over 2,000 in 2025 — numbers the ministry had not seen in nearly four decades of continuous operation. Regional Salt Company affiliates documented kickoff attendance increases in fall 2025 of 43 percent in Tallahassee, 56 percent in Denver, 62 percent in Syracuse, 69 percent in Eugene, 80 percent in Ann Arbor, 88 percent in West Lafayette, and 120 percent in Bloomington, Indiana. At The Ohio State University in August 2024, the football team helped host a campus worship and baptism event in which several hundred students were baptized in portable tanks set up on university property. At a single West Coast crusade in Anaheim during the same period, approximately 6,500 of an estimated 45,000 young people in attendance publicly professed faith in Jesus Christ.

Athlete-led Bible studies have multiplied across Division I football programs and other collegiate athletic contexts. At the University of Pittsburgh, a player-led group called Pitt Men of God began meeting weekly in football facilities after practice and consistently filled rooms; comparable groups now operate at dozens of major universities. United States Bible sales in 2025 crossed ten million copies, exceeding the prior year by more than one million, with younger buyers driving the growth. Between 2021 and 2023, Christian self-identification among Gen Z in the United States rose from approximately 45 percent to 51 percent — the first recorded reversal of a decades-long decline among any living American generation. Reports from campus ministry leaders across 2025 and into 2026 describe attendance and conversion patterns that experienced campus pastors characterize as unprecedented in their working memory.

The geography of the movement is not limited to the United States. Comparable patterns of student-initiated revival have been reported on campuses in the United Kingdom, Australia,

Brazil, South Korea, and several African nations, with the distinctive feature in each case being that the front line is being carried by the youngest cohort of the church — not by older institutional leadership.

9.2 Where the Movement Is Not Happening

It is equally important to name where the movement is largely not occurring. It is not, as a rule, breaking out in the production-centered megachurch sanctuary that the past forty years of evangelical leadership theory promised would reach the next generation. It is not occurring in the dimmed-room, fog-machine, branded-merchandise, charismatic lead-pastor environments that were specifically engineered to attract young people. The generation those environments were built for has, in significant numbers, walked past them to find a Bible study in a dorm room, a baptism in a fraternity backyard, or a worship gathering in a campus athletic facility. The professional church-growth apparatus did not produce the movement and is not, at present, the channel through which it is flowing.

This is not, by itself, a verdict on the older institutional church. Genuine work of the Spirit has occurred and continues to occur in many such congregations. But the empirical observation stands: the front line of what God is doing among Gen Z runs largely outside the CEO-pastor architecture. Any leadership theory that does not account for this has misread the moment.

10. The Three-Generation Pattern

A specific generational shape characterizes the present movement, and it is this shape that distinguishes the present hour from the most recent comparable outpouring — the Jesus People movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Jesus People movement carried much of the apostolic pastoral form and lacked one structural layer that proved costly. The present movement, in providential timing, has been given that layer. Three generations are now operating in distinct roles, each contributing what the Spirit appears to be calling that layer to provide.

10.1 Gen Z: The Front Line

Generation Z believers are carrying the front line of the present movement. They are the ones starting Bible studies in their dormitories without waiting for institutional permission. They are the athletes leading prayer in their locker rooms. They are the students preaching in fraternity houses, baptizing peers in backyard pools, gathering for worship in campus athletic facilities, and walking across their universities asking strangers if they know Jesus. The cultural fluency required to evangelize their own generation is something only their own generation possesses, and they are using it with a directness that older believers have, in many cases, been trained out of.

The functional shape of Gen Z's ministry is peer-to-peer, distributed, and largely platform-free. There is no Gen Z celebrity pastor at the center of this movement. There are millions of small acts of witness happening simultaneously across thousands of campuses, dormitories, workplaces, and online communities. Many of the believers carrying these acts have been Christians for less than two years. Their theology is in active formation. Their gifting outpaces their seasoning. They are, in apostolic terms, the sons and daughters of Joel's prophecy quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost.

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy...” — Acts 2:17, NKJV (quoting Joel 2:28)

Two features of this layer require honest acknowledgment. The first is that the Spirit's outpouring on the youngest cohort is consistent with the apostolic pattern: the church was born when a group of believers in their twenties and thirties (with a small number of older saints among them) began speaking the gospel in the streets of Jerusalem. The pattern is not novel. The second is that zeal in the young, however genuine, requires formation by Scripture and accountability to mature believers, or it drifts. This is the structural problem the Jesus People movement encountered most directly. It is also the problem the present movement appears to have been given the resources to solve, through the layer immediately above the front line.

10.2 Millennials: The Peer-Aged Disciplers

Millennials — born roughly 1981 to 1996, now in their late twenties through mid-forties — occupy the position the Jesus People movement most lacked. They are close enough in age and cultural fluency to Gen Z to walk in the same spaces, work in the same offices, attend the same gyms, and use the same digital tools. They are also far enough along in faith to have walked through the doctrinal and personal questions that Gen Z believers are now encountering for the first time. They have been through marriage; many have been through the difficulty of marriage. They have been through career transitions, job loss, the formation of children, the slow weariness of adult faith, and the long obedience of showing up at the same local church for ten or fifteen years. They are, structurally, the older brothers and sisters of the present movement.

The function of this layer is on-the-street discipleship at peer scale. A twenty-nine-year-old believer can sit on the floor of a Bible study a twenty-year-old has started, recognize the doctrinal question the younger believer has just hit, and walk through it from her own experience three years earlier. A thirty-four-year-old man can take an early morning call from a twenty-two-year-old who is wrestling with a temptation he himself navigated at the same age. The relational mode is brother to brother, sister to sister, peer running with peer. It is not authority figure presiding from above. The interaction takes place in coffee shops, sidewalks, kitchens, and apartments — the ordinary geography of overlapping adult lives. Titus 2 envisioned this relational mode at scale; the Spirit appears to be providing it now.

The Jesus People movement of the late 1960s lacked this layer almost entirely. The hippie converts of Haight-Ashbury, Costa Mesa, and Eugene poured into the kingdom in flood numbers, and the pastoral resources available to them were the older grey-haired pastors of the established churches, with very little in between. Lonnie Frisbee was twenty-four when he met Chuck Smith in 1968. There was almost no peer-aged believer to walk with him through the doctrinal and personal questions he encountered. The result was that brilliant young converts often had no peer to sit with them in the early morning hours and walk them through the issues before the issues hardened into wreckage. Frisbee himself is the most documented case; the painful arc of his later years and his death from AIDS in 1993 at age forty-three speaks, among other things, to the absence of the layer he most needed. The movement's flaws were not, fundamentally, theological errors at the top. They were structural gaps in the middle.

The present movement has the middle. Millennials, in providential timing, are now positioned to function exactly where the Jesus People movement most needed help. The empirical question of the next decade will be whether enough Millennial believers actually step into the role rather than waiting for a platform that the Spirit has decided not to give them.

10.3 Gen X and the Older Generation: Anchors in the Periphery

Gen X believers (born 1965 to 1980) and older saints occupy the third position in the pattern. Their function is not the front line and not the peer-aged accompaniment. It is the anchor in the periphery. They hold the long memory of what God has done. They carry the doctrinal depth that comes only from decades of reading Scripture under varied life conditions. They have watched

moves of God rise and fall. They have seen which patterns produced lasting fruit and which did not. They are not the ones starting the campus Bible studies; they are the ones available when the deeper question arises that neither the Gen Z trailblazer nor the Millennial peer can adequately answer.

The crucial structural feature of this layer is that it operates from the periphery rather than the center. It does not direct the movement. It does not set the strategy. It does not occupy the platform. It provides what might be called the comfort barrier — the assurance, often unspoken, that the front line is supported, prayed for, and connected to the long history of God’s faithfulness through previous generations. A Gen Z believer leading a dorm Bible study can take risks for the gospel he could not otherwise take, in part because he knows there is an older man in his church who is praying for him by name and would be available for coffee on any Tuesday morning. He may not see that older man often. He does not need to. The knowledge of the man’s presence — not controlling, not directing, not building anything around himself — is the structural support that allows the front line to press further than it could alone.

This is the role most easily misplayed. Some older believers, formed by the CEO-pastor model in their own younger years, attempt to direct the present movement from the center by force of habit. The result, in observable cases, has been to slow or quench what the Spirit was doing among the young. The older saints who have learned to function from the periphery, by contrast, are watching the very movement they have prayed for through decades of decline now unfold in front of them — and their function in this hour is to anchor it, not to take it over.

10.4 The Pattern in Scripture

The three-generation shape is not a sociological framework imposed on the apostolic record. It is the apostolic record’s own description of how the Spirit moves. Three passages anchor the pattern.

Joel 2:28-29, quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost, names three generational layers under one outpouring: “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams.” Each generation receives a distinct function under the same Spirit. The text does not collapse them into a single role. Sons and daughters — the youngest cohort, the present front line — prophesy. Young men, the rising adults in the immediate next layer, see visions of the work to be done. Old men dream dreams that anchor the present prophesying in something older than the present moment. Pentecost is the founding instance of this pattern; the Spirit Himself, in His inaugural public movement, refused the executive frame and distributed the work across three layers.

The apostle John, writing late in his life to a multi-generational body, addressed the same three layers separately and named what was true of each. “I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake. I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one” (1 John 2:12-13). Each layer has a different function. The little children know forgiveness; the young men are strong and overcoming; the fathers have known Him who is from the beginning.

The body is constitutionally three-generational, and the apostolic letter assumes the layers are operating together rather than collapsed into one.

Paul instructed Titus to teach older men and older women to admonish, exhort, and pattern faithful living for the younger generation, with younger leaders themselves “showing yourself to be a pattern of good works” (Titus 2:1-8). The relational mode is teaching alongside, not preaching from above. The older saints do not gather the younger ones into an auditorium and address them from a platform. They live next to them, work next to them, share life with them, and hand on what they themselves received. This is the apostolic norm. It is also, by its design, what the CEO-pastor model has structurally made impossible. A staff org chart does not produce a Titus 2 grandmother. A leadership pipeline does not produce a Titus 2 father. The pattern is carried by what an organization chart cannot build, only what a Spirit-filled body can become.

Three layers. Three functions. One Spirit. The Pentecost pattern is the apostolic norm, not a contemporary innovation.

11. The Jesus People Movement, Matured

The relationship between the present movement and the Jesus People movement of 1967 to roughly 1976 deserves direct treatment. The Jesus People movement was the closest the modern Western church has come, in living memory, to recovering the apostolic pastoral form. Several specific features defined it: ordinary homes as the primary pastoral environment (The Living Room in Haight-Ashbury, the House of Miracles in Costa Mesa, the Shiloh communal homes near Eugene, Oregon), pastors who were close enough in age to actually know their flocks (Chuck Smith was forty when Lonnie Frisbee arrived; most shepherding was done by men in their twenties and thirties), lay shepherding as the primary mode of formation, mission as the ordinary weekly rhythm, plain teaching of the whole Bible without performance, and a deliberate refusal of the brand impulse. It was, structurally, very close to Acts 2.

The Jesus People movement also had specific weaknesses, the most significant of which was the absence of the peer-aged disciple layer. Older grey-haired pastors were available; the youngest cohort of converts was multiplying; almost no one was in between. The movement's eventual partial absorption into the legacy denominational structures of the 1970s, the painful institutional handling of figures such as Lonnie Frisbee, the loss of much of the movement's prophetic edge by the early 1980s, and the gradual transformation of Jesus music into a commercial industry are all part of the honest historical record. The form was apostolic. The structural gap in the middle was costly.

The movement now emerging on college campuses across the United States and beyond is, in significant respects, a matured version of the same form. The same household scale (dorm rooms, apartments, fraternity and sorority houses, athlete locker rooms). The same lay-led shepherding (peer believers walking new converts through Scripture). The same mission as ordinary rhythm (street evangelism, dorm witness, public baptism). The same plain teaching of the whole Bible (the unprecedented Bible sales of 2025 drove demand for whole-Bible expository content, not for inspirational devotionals). And the same deliberate refusal of brand and platform among the front-line participants (no Gen Z celebrity pastors are leading this movement; thousands of unnamed students are).

What distinguishes the present movement is the layer the Jesus People movement lacked. Millennials are now the peer-aged believers immediately above the front line. They are not in their teens and twenties along with the new converts; they are ten to fifteen years older. They have been formed in faith long enough to provide the discipleship support the Jesus People generation needed and largely did not have. Where this layer functions faithfully, Gen Z believers are receiving in 2026 what their counterparts in 1971 did not receive: doctrinal grounding, accountability, and the stabilizing presence of a slightly older brother or sister who knows what they are walking through because she walked through it herself.

The Gen X and older layer, similarly, has been given an opportunity the equivalent generation in 1971 frequently missed. The grey-haired pastors of the late 1960s and early 1970s often attempted

to absorb the Jesus People movement into the institutional structures the new converts had providentially bypassed; the result, by the late 1970s, was a partial domestication of the move. The older generation in the present hour has the documentary record of that earlier domestication and has, in many observable cases, learned to function from the periphery rather than the center. Where this learning has occurred, the older generation is providing what the Jesus People movement most needed and rarely had: stable, available, prayerful older men and women who anchor the move without controlling it.

The Jesus People movement recovered the form. The structural gap in the middle is what the present movement has been given to fill. The opportunity now is for each generation to function in its proper layer rather than to repeat the error of its predecessors.

11.1 What the Pattern Replaces

What the CEO Model Trains	What the Multi-Generation Pattern Restores
A senior pastor at the center of the room	Three generations functioning together with no single human at the center
Volunteers organized to support the pastor's vision	Saints walking out their own ministries with cross-generational support
Younger believers waiting to be commissioned by leadership	Younger believers actively evangelizing because the Spirit has been poured out
Older believers retired from active ministry	Older believers anchoring from the periphery, available for the deeper conversation
Peer-aged believers as a demographic to be marketed to	Peer-aged believers as on-the-street disciplers of the front line
Vision cast from the front	Visions seen by the young, dreams dreamed by the old (Joel 2:28)
Discipleship as a program	Discipleship as Titus 2 lived in kitchens, dorms, and coffee shops
Brand built around the leader	No brand; the body bears the name of Christ alone

11.2 The Place of the Pastor in the Pattern

The multi-generation pattern does not eliminate the pastoral office. It restores the office to its proper position. The faithful pastor in this pattern is not absent and not silent. He is among the sheep, walking with them, plurally with other elders where possible, equipping rather than performing. He is, in age, almost always one of the older saints anchoring from the periphery, sometimes one of the peer-aged disciplers if he is younger. His function is to teach the whole counsel of God, to raise up other elders, to be available for the deeper questions, and to refuse the executive's job description in favor of the apostolic shepherd's. He occupies a particular place in the body. He does not occupy the others' places.

This requires, for many pastors currently inside the CEO frame, a sustained reorientation. The reorientation involves practical changes: removing institutional identity from the pastor's name, distributing decision-making across plural elders, replacing CEO metrics with apostolic metrics, declining outside speaking engagements that pull the pastor away from the local body, and learning to honor the work of the Spirit among Gen Z and Millennial believers as something the pastor anchors rather than directs. The reorientation also involves an interior change: the laying down of an identity built on the executive's role and the recovery of an identity anchored in being known by the Chief Shepherd. This is not a programmatic transition. It is a pastoral one, and it is the work in front of any pastor who reads this paper and recognizes himself in the diagnosis of Part II.

The pattern emerging on the campuses is the apostolic shape returning under the pressure of the Spirit Himself. Three generations. One Head. The CEO frame is not part of the pattern. It will not be permitted to absorb what it did not produce.

Conclusion

The argument of this paper has moved through three stages. Part I established the New Testament portrait of the shepherd — a man known by his sheep, present among them, feeding them with the word, defending them from wolves, accountable to the Chief Shepherd, producing the visible fruit of saints equipped, the body built up, disciples made, and elders raised up. Part II diagnosed the CEO-pastor model: its origins in the late-twentieth-century absorption of corporate management theory, the six categories of work it imports into the pastoral office, the metrics by which it has displaced apostolic measures, and the celebrity collapse cycle by which the model has been empirically falsified. Part III identified the recovery now underway across college campuses in the United States and beyond — a multi-generation pattern in which Gen Z carries the front line, Millennials run alongside as peer-aged disciplers, and Gen X and older saints anchor from the periphery.

The pattern emerging is not a new invention. It is the apostolic shape, attested in Joel 2, Acts 2, 1 John 2, and Titus 2, returning under the pressure of the Spirit Himself in a generation the institutional church's own marketing apparatus did not predict. The Jesus People movement of the late 1960s recovered much of this form and lacked the peer-aged middle layer; the present movement, in providential timing, has been given that layer. The empirical question for the next decade is whether the older generations will function in their proper places — Millennials as on-the-street disciplers, Gen X and older saints as anchors in the periphery, faithful pastors as plural shepherds rather than executives — or whether the inherited CEO architecture will attempt, as the institutional church of the 1970s attempted with the Jesus People movement, to absorb and domesticate what it did not produce.

The Chief Shepherd will examine every under-shepherd. The accounting will not be conducted by attendance figures, building budgets, brand recognition, conference invitations, or book sales. It will be conducted by the One who fed His own sheep with His body broken and His blood poured out, and who asked Peter on a Galilean beach the only question that has finally mattered for any pastor in any generation: “Do you love Me? Feed My sheep.” The pastor whose office has been carried in its biblical form has nothing to fear from this examination. The pastor whose office has been re-shaped around the executive's job description has the gift, in this hour, of recognizing the diagnosis in time to lay down the wrong staff and pick up the right one.

*“Ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it.” — Jeremiah 6:16,
NKJV*

The Chief Shepherd will not ask how large the platform was. He will ask whether the sheep were fed, the weak were strengthened, the lost were sought, and the office was held in the presence of the One who bought it with His own blood. The pattern has been given. The recovery is underway. The hour is here.

COVENANT DECREE

A Final Seal Upon the Ancient Paths

NOW IS THE TIME. THE TIME IS NOW.

$\sin^2t + \cos^2t = 1$

As the true shepherds arise and the spirit of the CEO is dethroned, we decree that every heart called to pastoral oversight is restored to the humble, sacrificial pattern of the Good Shepherd, leading the flock in the fear of the Lord rather than the ways of the world.

This decree is sealed in the Courts of Heaven and upon the pages of this document by the authority of the finished work of the Cross and the reclaimed master clock of the Kingdom.

It is finished.

GOD WINS — not eventually, but now.

Sealed by the Authority of the King of Kings

Appendix A: Scripture Map

Theme	Primary Passages
God as Shepherd of His People	Genesis 48:15; 49:24; Psalm 23; 80:1; 95:7; 100:3; Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:11-16; John 10:11-16
The False Shepherds Indicted	Jeremiah 23:1-4; Ezekiel 34:1-10; Zechariah 11:15-17; Matthew 9:36; John 10:12-13
Christ as the Good and Chief Shepherd	John 10:1-30; 21:15-19; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4; Revelation 7:17
The Apostolic Charge to Elders	Acts 20:17-38; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Hebrews 13:17
Plural Eldership in Every Church	Acts 14:23; 15:6; 20:17; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14
Qualifications: Character Before Capability	1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-3
Equipping Rather Than Performing	Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12; 14:26; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 4:10-11
Refusal of Domination and Lordship	Matthew 20:25-28; 23:5-12; Mark 10:42-45; 1 Peter 5:3; 3 John 9-10
The Stricter Judgment of Teachers	James 3:1; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15
The Three-Generation Pattern of the Spirit	Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18; 1 John 2:12-14
Cross-Generational Discipleship	Titus 2:1-8; 1 Timothy 4:12; 5:1-2; 2 Timothy 2:2
The Covenantal Handoff to the Next Generation	Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 78:1-7; 145:4; Malachi 4:5-6

Appendix B: Historical and Pastoral Guardrails

Strong critique must be joined to careful history and humble pastoral care. The following guardrails keep the argument sharp without becoming careless or unjust:

- Do not claim that every pastor inside the inherited Western model is unfaithful. Many are sincere, godly men laboring patiently in structures they did not design. They deserve honor, prayer, and patient conversation, not contempt.
- Do not weaponize Section 8 into ongoing personal attacks on the men named there. The named figures are referenced as documented public evidence of a structural pattern. Continued personal attacks on them or their families repeat the celebrity dynamic this paper opposes.
- Do not romanticize the Jesus People movement. The movement had real failures, including doctrinal unevenness in some streams, painful institutional handling of figures such as Lonnie Frisbee, and the eventual partial absorption of its energy by institutional structures. Section 11 argues that its pastoral form was apostolic, not that its history was without grief.
- Do not weaponize the multi-generation pattern into a generational hierarchy. The argument is that three layers function together under one Spirit, with no layer above the others. The model is not “the young are right and the old are wrong”; nor is it “the old must approve before the young can move.” The Spirit is poured out on all flesh.
- Do not romanticize Gen Z. The Gen Z movement currently underway is real and observable, but zeal in the young requires Scriptural formation and accountability to mature believers, or it drifts. The structural gift of the present hour is that the older layers are available; the question is whether they will function faithfully.
- Do not confuse anti-institutional resentment with biblical reformation. Reformation must be argued from Scripture and history, not from grievance. Bitterness will not build the Bride.
- Do not weaponize this paper to leave a faithful local church in anger. If God is calling a believer out of a congregation whose leadership has refused reformation, the leaving must be done with humility, in relationship, with prayer for those still inside, and without slander.

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