

APPLICATION GUIDE

Don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. - James 1:22

I intended the book you just read to be useful for pastors of every country and culture, every Christian theological leaning, and every denomination (including what some have called “the non-denominational denomination”). Therefore, I made it as general as possible.

This *Application Guide* is the opposite. I wrote it for you, the individual pastor or future pastor who is reading these words right now, in your specific, unique situation. My goal is to help you take the general principles from *Pastoring* and make them yours. Some of the questions, especially in the first chapters, are designed to make you think and pray about what you believe and why. Others are designed to take you from, “Hey, that’s a good idea!” to “Here’s an action plan for my church.”

Like anything in life, you’ll get out of this guide what you put into it. You can breeze through it, thinking only long enough to come up with something to write, and writing only enough to make it look like you wrote something. If this is a Bible school assignment you will be strongly tempted to do that. And let’s be honest: depending on your situation, that might be what you have to do right now. I know what it’s like to try to go to school at the same time you’re pastoring a church, or holding down a job, or both.

But if you possibly can, spend a little more time with the questions, at least some of them – God will show you which ones. Some parts of the book may not relate to you right now. It’s fine with me if you leave those for later. I hope when you come to the place in your ministry when they do relate, you’ll remember the book and this guide and they’ll help you then.

You can go through these questions as an individual exercise. It will help you clarify your beliefs and priorities about ministry and make some helpful action plans. But you'll get a lot more out of it if you work with a group. Read a chapter of *Pastoring*, then get together and discuss the application questions. God loves to use other people to stimulate our thinking.

All of the book will be good to talk over with other pastors. Parts of it can also be used with your church leaders. You can have them read the appropriate section, for instance about how to handle money, or you can just summarize it for them. Then use the questions in these pages to guide a conversation about the specific policies and practices you feel God wants you to implement in your congregation.

If you're married, I strongly encourage you to ask your spouse for their thoughts on some of these questions. You might be surprised at their insights.

Don't try to fit your answers into the margins of this book. It's human nature to limit our thinking to the space available, and that would limit you severely. Instead, record your answers in a notebook or computer file. The more you pray and think and the more details you write, the more you and your church will benefit.

I encourage you to review these questions every three to five years, or if you ever find yourself serving a different church. Things change, and a review might help you keep up with the changes. That's another reason to use a notebook or computer file, so you can update or expand on your answers.

Finally, I'm sure I don't need to remind you to soak this whole process in prayer. Bring each question to God, spend time thinking about it, and trust that what comes to mind is God's answer. God has plans for you, and he has plans for your church. I often tell my congregation, "Nobody is here by accident. God is up to something! He has gathered this group of people in this place at this time for a reason." I pray that as you prayerfully go through this guide, his reason and plans for you and your church will become clear.