



# The Exemplary Life of the Pastor According to 1 Timothy 4:12 as the Foundation for the Formation of Spiritually Mature Congregations

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**Abstract.** Quantitative church growth is not always accompanied by the spiritual maturity of the congregation. This phenomenon indicates a fundamental problem in faith formation within the church. One of the primary factors influencing the spiritual formation of the congregation is the exemplary life of the pastor as a spiritual leader. This study aims to examine, from a theological and biblical perspective, pastoral exemplarity according to 1 Timothy 4:12 and its relevance as the foundation for forming spiritually mature congregations. This research employs a qualitative method through a literature study approach and exegetical analysis of the biblical text, supported by theological reflections from biblical commentators and theologians. The results indicate that pastoral exemplarity encompasses five principal aspects: speech, conduct, love, faith (faithfulness), and purity. These five aspects form an integrated unity that serves as the foundation for guiding the congregation toward genuine spiritual maturity. This study affirms that pastoral exemplarity is not merely a supporting factor in ministry but a theological foundation for the spiritual growth of the congregation.

**Keywords:** pastoral exemplarity, 1 Timothy 4:12, spiritual leadership, congregational formation, spiritual maturity.

## 1. BACKGROUND

The contemporary church faces serious challenges in nurturing congregations toward spiritual maturity. The growth in the number of churches and worship activities is often not aligned with the quality of the congregation's spiritual life. Many congregations exhibit weak faith commitment, low levels of Christian moral exemplarity, and inconsistency between faith confession and daily life practices. This condition indicates that the church's spiritual formation has not yet been fully effective.

Within this context, the role of the pastor as a spiritual leader becomes highly strategic. Pastors function not only as teachers of the Word but also as exemplary figures whose lives are observed and imitated by the congregation. Pastoral theology emphasizes that effective spiritual leadership is rooted in personal integrity and exemplary living rather than merely organizational competence (D.J, 2002; Rice, 2006).

Several previous studies have emphasized the importance of pastoral exemplarity. Santo and Simanjuntak (2019) found that pastoral exemplarity has a significant relationship with congregational faith growth. Telaumbanua (2019) emphasized that effective pastoral ministry must be grounded in personal relationships and exemplary living. Research by Naftaliance et al.

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(2021) indicates that younger generations tend to lose interest in church life when they fail to find authentic spiritual leaders.

However, most of these studies focus primarily on practical and empirical dimensions, while theological-exegetical studies of biblical texts—particularly 1 Timothy 4:12—remain limited. Furthermore, pastoral exemplarity is often positioned merely as a supporting factor in congregational growth rather than as the primary foundation of spiritual formation. Therefore, this study seeks to address this research gap by affirming pastoral exemplarity according to 1 Timothy 4:12 as the theological foundation for the formation of spiritually mature congregations.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Pastoral Exemplarity in the Perspective of 1 Timothy 4:12*

First Timothy 4:12 affirms the calling of spiritual leaders to become examples for believers. The term “example” is derived from the Greek word *τύπος* (*typos*), meaning a pattern or model to be imitated (Benson, 2023). Paul exhorts Timothy not to rely merely on positional authority but to demonstrate a quality of life that reflects the character of Christ. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown (2012) emphasize that exemplarity is the primary means by which trust is established among the congregation, particularly when the leader is young. Exemplarity thus becomes the true legitimacy of spiritual leadership.

#### *Dimensions of Pastoral Exemplarity*

##### *a. Exemplarity in Speech*

Exemplarity in speech includes both teaching and daily communication. Ellicott (2015) stresses that the speech of spiritual leaders must reflect truth, love, and wisdom. Gill (2012) adds that uncontrolled speech can damage the credibility of pastoral ministry.

##### *b. Exemplarity in Conduct*

Conduct refers to lifestyle and concrete actions. According to Poole (2015), the daily life of a pastor must align with the gospel he proclaims. Exemplarity in conduct serves as evidence of the authenticity of the faith being taught.

##### *c. Exemplarity in Love*

Love is the core of Christian life. Jamieson et al. (2012) assert that spiritual leadership devoid of love loses its pastoral dimension. The love exemplified by pastors must be sacrificial and service-oriented.

##### *d. Exemplarity in Faith (Faithfulness)*

Faith in this context refers to faithfulness to Christ and the truth of the gospel. Gill (2012) explains that exemplary faith is manifested through perseverance in suffering and consistency in ministry.

#### e. *Exemplarity in Purity*

Purity reflects the moral integrity of spiritual leaders. Ellicott (2015) emphasizes that purity is an absolute requirement so that the pastor's life does not become a stumbling block to the congregation.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODE

This study employs a qualitative approach using a literature study method. The primary data source is the Bible, particularly 1 Timothy 4:12, which is analysed exegetically. Secondary sources include biblical commentaries, books on pastoral theology, and relevant previous research. Data analysis is conducted descriptively and analytically to obtain a comprehensive theological understanding of pastoral exemplarity and congregational formation.

### 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### *Pastoral Exemplarity as the Foundation for the Formation of Spiritually Mature Congregations*

The theological and biblical analysis demonstrates that pastoral exemplarity according to 1 Timothy 4:12 constitutes the primary foundation for guiding congregations toward spiritual maturity. Exemplarity functions not merely as moral modeling but as a pedagogical and pastoral instrument that shapes the congregation's way of thinking, attitudes, and behavior. This aligns with Paul's view that the life of a spiritual leader must become a "pattern" (*τύπος*) to be imitated by believers (Benson, 2023; Jamieson et al., 2012).

The failure of churches to cultivate spiritual maturity among congregations is often associated with inconsistency between biblical teaching and the lived practices of spiritual leaders. When pastors fail to embody what they teach, congregations experience theological confusion and a crisis of exemplarity, which weakens faith development and Christian character formation (Erastus, 2016; Santo & Simanjuntak, 2019).

These findings are reinforced by recent studies in practical theology, which indicate that congregations—especially younger generations—more readily internalize faith values through lived exemplarity than through verbal instruction alone (Naftaliance et al., 2021; Siagian & Mokalu, 2021). Therefore, pastoral exemplarity must be understood as the primary medium of spiritual transformation within the congregation.

#### *Exemplarity in Speech and the Formation of Congregational Faith*

The analysis shows that exemplarity in speech has a significant influence on the formation of congregational faith and ethics. Paul places "speech" as the first dimension of exemplarity (1 Tim. 4:12), indicating its urgency in spiritual leadership. Pastoral speech is not merely communicative but reflective of inner integrity and spiritual maturity.

Ellicott (2015) and Gill (2012) emphasize that the speech of spiritual leaders must be edifying, loving, and aligned with biblical truth. Inconsistent speech—such as harsh, manipulative, or self-serving language—undermines congregational trust and weakens spiritual formation. Recent research in Christian education confirms that leader communication marked by integrity significantly contributes to character development and spiritual maturity (Rinto Francius Sirait, 2025b; Setiadarma, 2023). Thus, exemplarity in speech serves as the foundation of healthy faith communication.

### ***Exemplarity in Conduct and Consistency in Christian Living***

Exemplarity in conduct constitutes tangible evidence of a pastor's faith authenticity. Conduct reflects the consistency between what is taught and what is lived. Gill (2012) asserts that the life of a spiritual leader must “adorn the gospel of Christ” through godliness, honesty, and sincerity.

The findings indicate that congregations tend to experience healthy spiritual growth when they observe concrete expressions of Christian life in their pastors. Conversely, pastoral inconsistency often becomes a stumbling block that hinders faith development and fosters disappointment toward the church. This is consistent with Telaumbanua's (2019) findings that pastoral exemplarity is a key factor in effective shepherding. Contemporary studies also reveal that younger generations are highly sensitive to discrepancies between professed values and lived practices, leading them to disengage from church life when exemplarity is absent (Naftaliance et al., 2021; Rinto Francius Sirait, 2025a).

### ***Exemplarity in Love as the Core of Pastoral Relationships***

Love is central to all dimensions of pastoral exemplarity. Paul places love as the core of Christian life, without which all ministerial activities lose their spiritual significance. The study affirms that pastoral love must be sacrificial, selfless, and forgiving, following the example of Christ (John 13:34–35).

Jamieson et al. (2012), Rinto (2025) and Rice (2006) argue that pastoral leadership lacking love tends to become authoritarian and transactional. In contrast, authentic love fosters secure pastoral relationships and cultivates congregational trust. Recent pastoral theology research shows that relationships grounded in love accelerate spiritual healing and faith maturation (Rinto Francius Sirait, 2025c). Hence, exemplarity in love is not merely an ethical requirement but an effective and contextual instrument of spiritual formation.

### ***Exemplarity in Faith and Congregational Resilience***

Exemplarity in faith (*faithfulness*) refers to pastoral loyalty to Christ and the truth of the gospel. A living faith is manifested through perseverance, consistency in ministry, and courage in defending biblical truth. Gill (2012) affirms that exemplary faith provides spiritual stability for congregations amid crises and suffering.

Contemporary research demonstrates that congregations led by pastors with steadfast faith tend to exhibit greater spiritual resilience in facing social pressures and cultural changes (Siagian & Mokalu, 2021). This confirms that pastoral faith exemplarity functions as a spiritual anchor for the congregation.

### ***Exemplarity in Purity and Ecclesial Integrity***

Purity is a crucial dimension of pastoral exemplarity because it directly relates to church integrity. Ellicott (2015) and Poole (2015) stress that the moral purity of spiritual leaders preserves the credibility of the church's witness in society. The study indicates that pastoral moral failure often produces systemic consequences, affecting not only individuals but also congregational trust in the church institution.

Recent practical theology research confirms that the moral integrity of church leaders directly influences ecclesial credibility and the effectiveness of spiritual formation (Santo & Simanjuntak, 2019). Therefore, exemplarity in purity must be understood as a non-negotiable theological and pastoral responsibility.

### ***Theological Synthesis***

Based on the findings above, it can be concluded that pastoral exemplarity according to 1 Timothy 4:12 constitutes an integral foundation for the formation of spiritually mature congregations. The five dimensions of exemplarity—speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity—are interrelated and form a coherent whole. Pastoral exemplarity not only strengthens the teaching of God's Word but also actualizes Christian faith in the daily lives of the congregation.

Thus, this study affirms that effective congregational formation must begin with pastors whose lives are continually transformed by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, enabling the church to grow in a healthy, mature, and faithful manner according to God's will.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Pastoral exemplarity according to 1 Timothy 4:12 is a theological mandate that significantly determines the quality of congregational formation. Exemplarity in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity constitutes the foundation for guiding congregations toward genuine spiritual maturity. This study confirms that pastoral exemplarity is not merely a supporting factor but the primary foundation of church life.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that churches and theological institutions prioritize character formation and spirituality in the training of pastoral candidates. Future research may further develop this study through empirical approaches to measure quantitatively the impact of pastoral exemplarity on congregational spiritual maturity.

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