



AI and the Church: Discernment, Tension, and Opportunity

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Every Generation Faces Its Defining Technology

Throughout recent history, each era has been confronted by a powerful new tool that promised — and delivered — world-changing transformation. **The Church has navigated every one of them.**

The Printing Press

Opened access to Scripture and knowledge



The Internet

Connected the world in an instant



Artificial Intelligence

The defining challenge of our moment



Radio & Television

Broadcast the Gospel across continents



Social Media

Reshaped community and conversation



"Can the Church leverage this powerful new tool without allowing it to reshape the Church?"

What We Learned: The Church Is Asking Us to Lead

Our survey captured **743 responses** from pastors, leaders, and members across our English, Spanish, and French-speaking churches.

📄 This is not just a trend report — it is a pastoral call to action. Our people are looking to us for guidance.



84%

of respondents say Christians should pay attention to how AI is shaping our culture.

Observation #1: We Cannot Ignore AI

An overwhelming majority of our survey respondents — **84%** — believe that Christians have a responsibility to pay careful attention to how artificial intelligence is shaping culture, society, and everyday life.

Our people — across language groups, across age brackets — recognize that AI is a cultural force that demands a biblical response.

74%

support churches exploring careful and wise uses of AI in ministry.

Observation #2: Our People Are Open, But Cautious

Nearly three-quarters of respondents — **74%** — expressed support for churches exploring careful and wise uses of AI in ministry contexts. This is a significant and encouraging finding.

Our people are not asking us to hide from this technology. They are asking us to *engage it wisely* — with discernment, with guardrails, and with a clear sense of what we are protecting.

Observation #3: Our People Want Guidance

87%

Want Ethical Guidelines

Believe churches should develop clear ethical guidelines for the use of AI in ministry.

72%

Want Training & Resources

Said they want practical training or accessible resources to help them engage AI wisely in their personal and ministry lives.

The message is clear. Our people are not waiting for the culture to shape them. They want the Church to lead.

Observation #4: Support Rises When AI Supports — Not Replaces

People draw a meaningful line between AI as a *ministry assistant* and AI as a *ministry substitute*. Comfort levels rise significantly when AI enhances rather than displaces human pastoral work.



Ministry Communications

Support using AI for newsletters, emails, and announcements



Administrative Tasks

Support using AI for scheduling, summaries, and organizational work

Observation #5: Support Drops Near the Spiritual Center

36%

Sermon Preparation

Only about 36% expressed comfort with AI assisting in sermon or teaching preparation — a striking contrast to administrative support.

46%

Spiritual Authority

Nearly half worried that AI could begin to function as a *spiritual authority* rather than pointing people to Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

78%

Biblical Trust

The most striking finding. 78% worry that younger generations may someday place greater trust in AI than in Scripture or their spiritual leaders.



Where Pastors and Congregants Agree

Despite differences in perspective, our survey revealed a powerful shared foundation between pastoral leadership and the people they serve.



Pay Attention

Both groups believe Christians should take AI's cultural influence seriously and engage it thoughtfully rather than passively.



Careful Exploration

Both support the Church's careful and wise exploration of AI tools for legitimate ministry use.



Ethical Guidelines

Both want principled frameworks, clear ethical guardrails that reflect our values as a Spirit-led community.



Biblical Authority

Both are deeply committed to protecting the authority of Scripture and the irreplaceable ministry of the Holy Spirit.



Where They Differed: A Matter of Perspective

The differences between pastors and congregants were not matters of theology. They were matters of *perspective and proximity*.

Pastoral Leaders

Pastors tended to be **more optimistic** about AI's practical value — perhaps because they have already seen firsthand how ministry tools can multiply their capacity to serve.

Congregants

Members tended to be **more concerned** about AI's potential risks — perhaps because they are navigating AI's influence in workplaces, homes, and schools in ways their pastors may not yet see.

Both perspectives are valuable. Both deserve to be heard. Wise leadership listens to both.

What Our People Are Actually Saying

Beneath the data, written in the open-ended responses of our survey, were voices that deserve to be heard in every pastor's heart:

“

"Don't let convenience replace dependence on God."

”

“

"Don't allow technology to weaken prayer."

”

“

"Protect the authority of Scripture."

”

“

"Don't lose the human touch."

”

"Our people aren't primarily afraid of software. They're afraid of losing something sacred and holy."

We should **honor** — not dismiss, not manage, but genuinely honor.
It is a spiritually discerning instinct, and it is exactly the kind of wisdom
that should shape how we lead.

Discernment: The Difference Between an Assistant and a Shepherd

The most important question for us is not whether AI is powerful. It is.

The question is, **what belongs to the shepherd alone?**



AI Will Never...

No matter how capable AI becomes, there is a list of things it will never do. Not because the technology isn't advancing — but because these things belong to a *calling*, not a capability:

→ **It will never truly pray — or be filled with the Holy Spirit.**

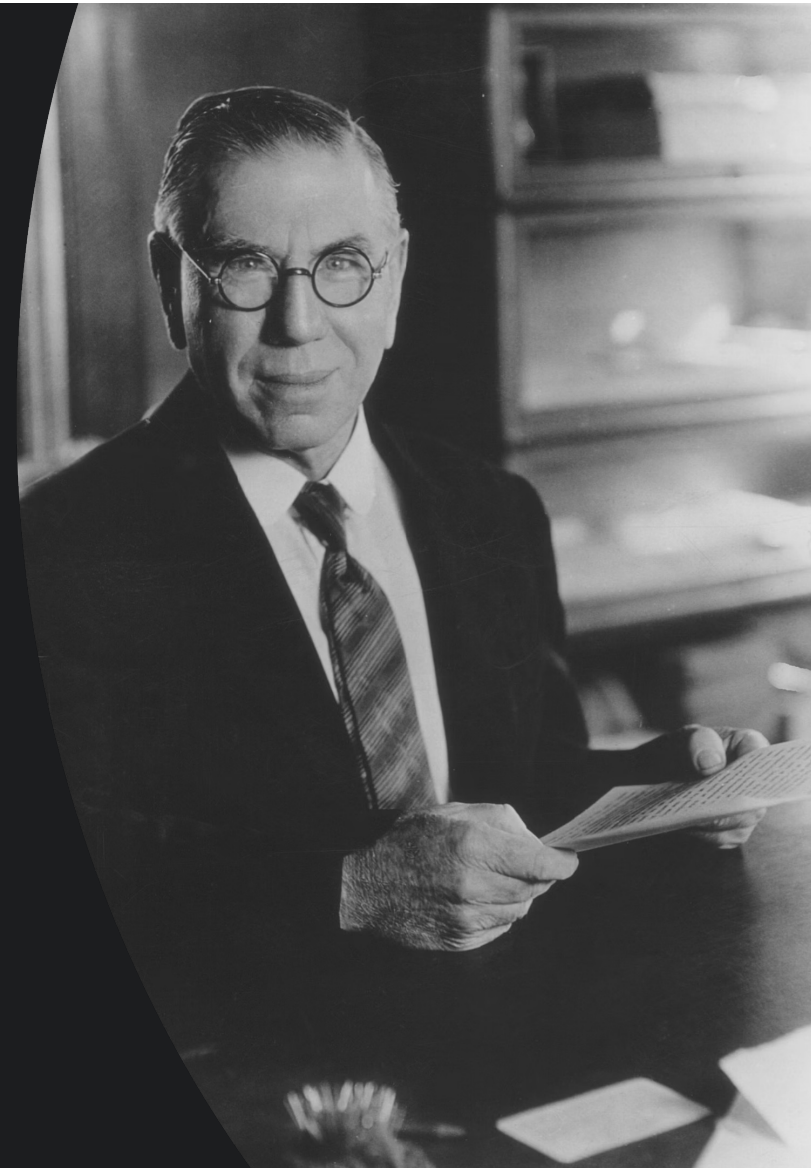
→ **It will never sit beside a grieving widow or anoint someone with oil.**

→ **It will never stand at a hospital bedside or baptize a new believer.**

→ **It will never disciple a teenager or love your congregation.**

→ **It will never stand before God and give an account for the souls entrusted to your care.**

"The Lord has placed before His Church every new instrument of man's ingenuity. If artificial intelligence can hasten the proclamation of the gospel, then let us sanctify it for His glory and carry the message to every nation without delay." — A. J. Tomlinson



**"Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding."
— Proverbs 3:5**



The Danger of Skipping the Process

Every spiritual discipline has a temptation now — a shortcut dressed as efficiency. But God has always been more interested in forming us than in producing output through us.

Instead of wrestling with Scripture...

we ask for a summary.

Instead of praying over difficult decisions...

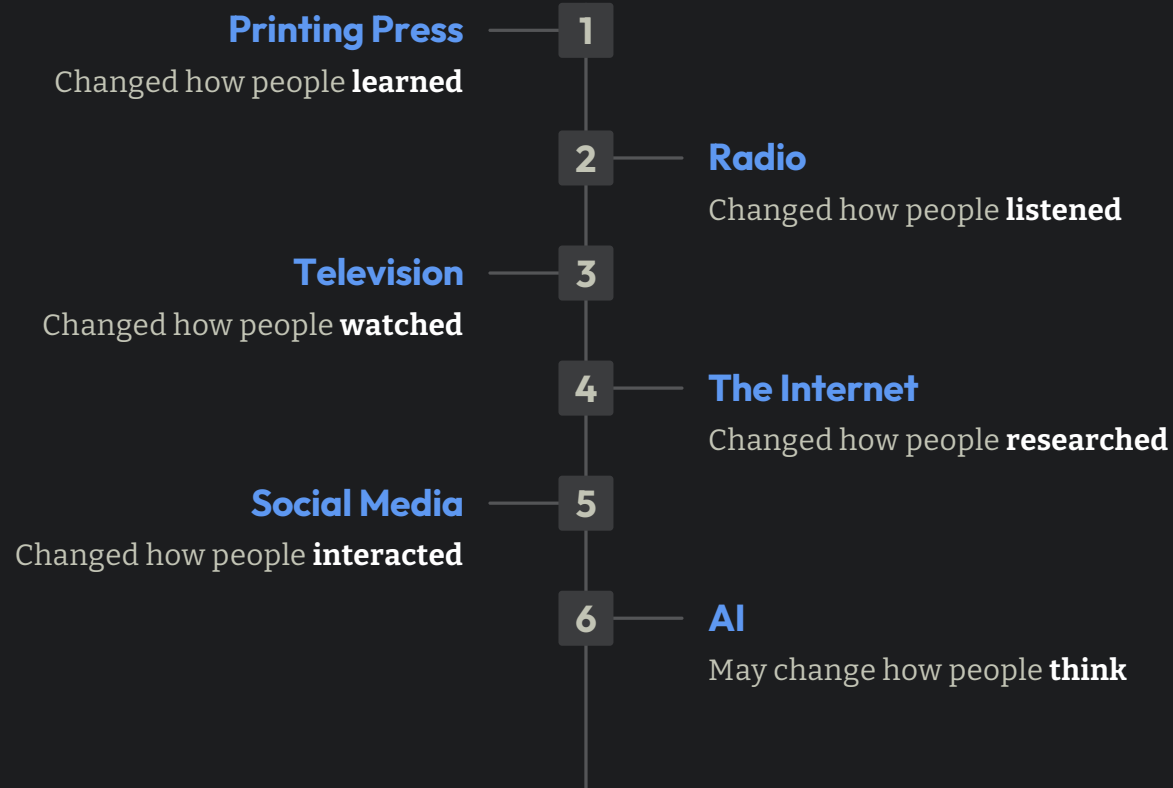
we ask for suggestions.

Instead of thinking deeply...

we settle for quick answers.

Technology always promises efficiency. But **discipleship has never been built on efficiency.** God often forms us through the very processes we'd most like to skip.

How Every Technology Reshapes Its Generation



You Are Still the Shepherd

The tool does not define the calling. The Spirit does. Here is the line that must never be crossed:

AI as Assistant

- If AI organizes your calendar...**you're still the shepherd.**
- If AI helps draft your weekly email... **you're still the shepherd.**
- If AI summarizes meeting notes... **you're still the shepherd.**
- If AI translates a ministry resource... **you're still the shepherd.**

AI as Replacement

But if AI begins replacing:

- Prayer
- Discernment
- Biblical study
- Pastoral presence
- Spiritual responsibility

Something has gone terribly wrong. Those things belong to the calling God placed on you.

**Our goal isn't to
build AI-powered
churches.**

**Our goal is to build
Spirit-filled
churches.**





Four Guardrails for Wise Use of AI in Ministry

Guardrail #1: Practice Transparency

About **65% of respondents** said they would feel more comfortable with AI in ministry if they understood how their church was using it — and why.

When you use AI tools to assist your writing, say so. When AI helps you design graphics or draft communications, acknowledge it. This models the intellectual honesty we want to cultivate in our congregations.

- 📄 Example disclosure: "This article was refined using AI tools (ChatGPT, OpenAI; Grok, xAI) for grammar, formatting, and style. Theological perspectives and content reflect the author's perspective."

Guardrail #2: Never Delegate Discernment

AI can produce *beautiful sentences* and *completely inaccurate theology* in the same paragraph. This is not a minor bug — it is a fundamental limitation of how these systems work. They generate plausible-sounding text, not verified truth.

It Can Invent Quotations

AI may produce compelling quotes attributed to theologians, church fathers, or authors — that were never actually said.

It Can Misquote Scripture

AI may paraphrase or blend Bible verses in ways that subtly distort meaning — and do so confidently.

It Can Fabricate Sources

AI may cite books, studies, or articles that do not exist. Always verify before you publish or preach.

Never let AI have the final, unvetted word.

Guardrail #3: Redeem the Time

The Apostle Paul urged believers to make the most of every opportunity — to *redeem the time* (Ephesians 5:16). AI can be a genuine instrument of that redemption when used with intentionality.

If AI saves you two hours of administrative work each week, the question is not just "how efficient am I?" The deeper question is: **what will I do with those two hours?**

Time saved is only a gift when it is reinvested in what matters most. AI should create space for the sacred — not crowd it out with more productivity.



Guardrail #4: Protect People's Trust

Your congregation trusts you with some of the most sensitive information in their lives — their struggles, their sins, their family crises, their counseling concerns. That trust is sacred.

What This Means Practically

Do not enter member names, counseling details, financial situations, or personal prayer requests into AI tools without understanding how that data is stored and used.

Why It Matters

Most consumer AI platforms are not HIPAA-compliant or designed for confidential pastoral care. What you type may be used to train future models.

The Pastoral Standard

Apply the same standard you would to any public platform: if you wouldn't say it from the pulpit, don't type it into an AI chatbot.

The Four Guardrails — A Summary



Be Transparent

Tell your people when and how you use AI.
Model honesty and integrity in every context.



Redeem the Time

Use efficiency gains to invest more deeply in
what only a shepherd can do.



Verify Everything

Never let AI have the final word on Scripture,
theology, or factual claims.



Protect People's Trust

Handle sensitive information with the same
care you would in any pastoral context.

Where AI Can Actually Help Your Ministry

1

Communication

AI can help you write clearer newsletters, better announcements, more compelling emails, and more consistent social media content.

2

Repurpose Your Sermons

Upload your sermon transcript and ask AI to create: small group discussion questions, a one-page devotional, a youth guide, a website summary, social media posts, and a first-time guest follow-up email — all from one message.

3

Brainstorming

Ask AI: "Give me five biblical illustrations of discernment." Or: "How might a pastor explain this concept to teenagers?"

Use it as a thinking partner but never as the final authority.

Where AI Can Help: Translation

What's Now Possible

AI translation tools can now produce drafts of sermons, devotionals, newsletters, and resources in multiple languages — in minutes rather than weeks. What once required a professional translator or a bilingual team member is now accessible to any pastor with a laptop.

What Still Requires You

AI translation is a *first draft*, not a final product. Cultural nuance, theological precision, and idiomatic expression still need human review — ideally from a native speaker in your congregation or network. Use AI to accelerate the process, not to replace the people.

Where AI Can Help: Organization

Much of pastoral ministry involves invisible administrative labor — the meetings summarized, the notes organized, the reports drafted, the checklists maintained. AI can carry a meaningful share of that burden.



Meeting Summaries

Paste your notes or transcript into an AI tool and ask for a clean summary with action items. What took 30 minutes now takes 3.



Checklists & Plans

Ask AI to create event checklists, volunteer coordination plans, or first draft ministry calendars — then refine them with your team.



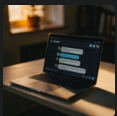
First-Draft Reports

Give AI your raw data or bullet points and ask for a structured first draft of a board report, newsletter update, or annual summary.

Time recaptured from administration is time returned to people. That's a worthy investment.

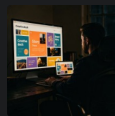
Where Should You Start? Three Tools to Know

You don't need to become a technology expert. You just need a few reliable starting points. Here are three tools worth exploring:



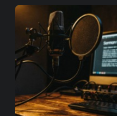
ChatGPT

Best for: Brainstorming, writing first drafts, organizing ideas, and exploring questions. This is the most versatile starting point for most pastors. It's conversational, accessible, and surprisingly capable at theological thinking — with appropriate verification.



Canva

Best for: Design. Canva has become one of the best platforms available for church communications. Its AI features help create slides, graphics, flyers, and social media posts — without needing a professional designer on staff.



Otter or Fireflies

Best for: Transcription. These tools automatically convert your sermons and meetings into searchable text — which can then be repurposed into devotionals, discussion guides, and articles with minimal extra effort.

Our Deepest Goal: Disciples in an AI-Shaped World

If we lead wisely — with transparency, discernment, integrity, and a firm grasp on what belongs to the shepherd alone — our people will be equipped for whatever comes next.

If we do that well, our people won't simply learn how to use AI. They'll learn how to **think like disciples in an AI-shaped world.**





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