



# Notes on discipleship and pastoring – principles and practice

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## 1. Biblical principles

God wants his people cared for – and well cared for. Ezekiel 34 and John 10 both talk about God's shepherd heart.

Pastors are one of the gifts given by the ascended Christ to the church. What are the principles underlying pastoral relationships in the church, and how do they operate within the church?

### 1.1. Principle One: Care

Some things should go without saying, but for a full picture, we need to state the obvious: God loves people and gives them leaders to care for them:

*Ezekiel 34*

*Psalm 78.72 "David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them."*

*1 Peter 5.1-5 "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: <sup>2</sup>Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; <sup>3</sup>not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup>And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away."*

Pastors are God's gift to the church to exercise adequate care for people.

*Key passage: 1 Thessalonians 2 shows us Paul's attitude*

The people belong to God. They are *his*; they are not *ours*. Our pastoral ministry is a serving ministry – serving the head of the church!

*John 10 and 1 Peter 5*

Care inevitably involves time – and often caring for people individually amidst busy 'ministry schedules'!

*Mark 5.21ff*

Time

- to stop – amidst business
- for individuals – the "little" people
- to talk
- for the personal touch. "Daughter"....
- to include people (isolation, marginalised etc)
- to reassure

## **1.2. Principle Two: Discipleship**

Discipleship is not an optional extra, the 'icing on the cake', or just about special courses! It is God's strategy for bringing in the kingdom! At the very start and heart of Jesus' ministry to 'bring the kingdom' was a discipleship strategy:

*Mark 1.14-20 "Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup>'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!' <sup>16</sup>As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup>'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.'*

It is rooted in relationship and essential for helping people into their full potential and destiny in God!

*Key passage: Matthew 16.13-28*

From Jesus' encounter here with Peter, we see that discipleship involves:

- Encouragement
- Vision for the person being discipled
- Personal challenge and provocation
- Teaching and explanation of principles of the Kingdom

## **1.3. Principle Three: Accountability**

The principle of accountability is written into the whole creation. Our lives are not our own: they belong to God, and were created for His glory. That accountability is obviously to God. So Adam is called to account immediately after his sin of rebellion from God, and pays the price.

Mt 25.14-30 makes clear that we are all given gifts by God and that we will give account for how we invest them. God's Kingdom involves accountability, i.e. taking seriously the notion that I am a steward, not an owner, of the gifts God has given me, my talents and work, my home and family, my gifts and calling. If I am a steward, I know I am accountable, and training in being accountable works in me a servant's heart and a desire to learn so that I can be a better steward.

## **1.4. Principle Four: Spiritual Authority**

Principles of authority are everywhere in God's world, in God's Kingdom, and in the church. Leaders are consistently seen as a blessing in scripture, except where they fail to fulfil their call and responsibility properly.

God's kingdom works in order and authority. To illustrate, here are 5 examples where God's order and authority can be seen:

- Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- Angels, archangels, cherubim and seraphim
- First apostles, second prophets
- The three, the twelve, the seventy
- The parable of the talents

**Authority – from the point of view of the person receiving it:**

- **Receiving authority is a sign of great faith**  
Matthew 8.10
- **Being under authority is a key to having authority**  
Matthew 8.9
- **Receiving authority is a key to growth and maturity**  
Recognising God's authority – and the authority that comes through leaders – is a key to growth and maturity (Hebrews 13.17)

- **Authority brings security and protection**  
The benefits of being under spiritual authority, apart simply from the joy of being yoked in friendship and relationship, are boundaries, security and protection. (Hebrews 13.17; Acts 20.28; Judges 21.25; Nehemiah 3.1-14)

### **Authority – from the point of view of the one exercising it**

- **How authority functions**  
Authority only functions where it is recognised. Therefore do not push your pastoral care on to people if they become resistant. Knock at the door by all means. But if it does not open, stand back and see what God will do. (1 Corinthians 4.15, 9.1-3; John 10.2-4, 6.37)
- **True authority is serving in nature**  
Pastors should look for opportunity to serve the people they pastor. Disciples should also look to serve, of course, but it starts with the example set by leaders. (John 13.3-14, 21.9-10; Luke 22.25; Matthew 20.20-28)
- **Authority flows from our example**  
The pastor's main authority is the authority of example. Paul said: "Follow me, as I follow Christ" (1 Corinthians 11.1)

## **2. In practice: how do we care properly for God's people?**

The principles we have already stated; how we 'manage' our pastoral care is a pragmatic issue, and we can't claim any direct Biblical instruction on this! If the principles are being applied, I believe God will be well satisfied!

However, over the years, in the Salt & Light family of churches, we have developed a pattern of caring for people one-to-one which we believe allows these principles to be applied in the best possible way.

We encourage people to develop one-to-one pastoral relationships within the local church situation (It is unworkable for people to be pastored outside of the local church setting – the elders of the church are the ones who are entrusted with the care of the church under Christ's headship. To look for care outside of your local elders probably means that you should be part of another church family. We either find care under our local elders and leaders, or we go and join a family led by other elders and leaders by whom we are happy to be cared for.) This allows care for God's people to be personal, close, and specific.

### **2.1. Getting going – finding a personal pastor**

- **Prepare properly!**  
Before you can introduce people to this pattern of care, they need to understand properly the benefits of developing pastoral relationships. There therefore needs to be clear teaching and good interaction to explain this properly. Since these relationships only work where they are received (see later), you cannot force them on people. You can, however, encourage them, and set an atmosphere where people are receiving this sort of care, benefiting from it, and testifying to it.
- **People need to ask God!**  
People need to be encouraged to pray, and seek God for whom He is marking out to be their personal pastor. Leaders may have to give some guidance, or a framework for seeking God in this way – i.e. "X or Y doesn't really have time, but A or B could – and I would encourage you to think about so-and-so." People will have faith for what they feel they have heard themselves from God.
- **The pastor needs to ask God!**  
The 'shepherd' or 'pastor' needs also to pray about whether they are willing to pastor this person. A "pastor" having vision for the people he/she pastors is essential.
- **The relationship needs to be developed**  
Pastoral relationships work best where contact can be easy and regular. Friendship is the very essence of these relationships. (more on this later)

## ***2.2. Setting clear expectations***

Once people are committed to personal pastoral relationships, it is important for there to be good and clear communication between the pastor and those being pastored as to what the expectations of this relationship really are. This needs to be done right at the outset of the relationship, and should be reviewed at various points as the relationship proceeds.

So the following questions need to be asked and answered together:

- What is the disciple looking for?
- What does the pastor feel God is looking for?

Out of this will flow an agreed 'agenda' involving:

- Goals to work on
- How often the pastor and disciple meet
- How a friendship can be developed

### **Jesus' goals for his 'personal pastoring' relationships**

On the basis of Jesus' relationship with his disciples, personal pastoring relationships should be aimed at developing the following:

- **The disciple's personal relationship with God**  
Therefore, regular questions should be asked concerning his/her devotional life, prayer, Bible reading, personal worship, not by way of inquisition (!), but by way of opening out any struggles. Goals and strategies in developing these areas are essential. But everything has to be rooted in the disciple's personal relationship with God, otherwise they will end up in performance for their pastor, but not reality with Christ.
- **Character**  
Much of Jesus' discipleship of his disciples handled real-life issues. Money, ambition, integrity, anger, anxiety, lust, self-promotion, faithfulness, these and many other aspects of day-to-day life are developed by Jesus with his disciples.
- **Ministry**  
Jesus called his disciples to follow him on the basis of a future goal and vision for their lives. He was going to help them develop areas of service and ministry. We definitely want to disciple people into effective ministry for Christ. "I will make you fishers of men" also indicates a clear evangelistic goal, and the gift of the Holy Spirit culminates in giving the apostles boldness to witness to the resurrection of Christ. Evangelistic ministry, or being witnesses, cannot be left out of this ministry development.
- **Perseverance**  
One of the aspects of walking with Christ is the ability to stand firm in struggle, and to keep going in adversity. Stability and consistency of walk with Christ is very important. Learning to walk by the Spirit and stand in the Spirit helps us to live not on the basis of emotional ups and downs, or bursts of 'soulful' enthusiasm or fleshly willpower, but rooted in the word of God, His grace and His daily provision.

## ***2.3. Making a personal pastoring relationship work***

This can probably best be broken down into two questions:

### **What should the pastor be seeking to do?**

1. To express genuine care to those being pastored. Time to talk, interest in their world i.e. their family, work, leisure interests as well as the "more spiritual" side of their life.
1. To be praying for those being cared for. God will highlight areas of need/ things he wants to say concerning people. (Jesus is the door to the sheepfold. Jn 10.1-2)
2. To encourage. What you encourage you get more of. Pastors need to be great encouragers.

3. To encourage disciples to have vision for themselves, and indeed to have vision for the disciple, based on a sober evaluation of their gifting and tested prophetic words over their life.
4. To challenge, as appropriate, first by asking questions, and then by more direct confrontation, areas of weakness or obvious struggle.
5. To set goals with the disciple, based on what they genuinely desire for themselves.
6. To build friendship, and time relaxing family to family/ individual to individual.
7. To visit the disciple's home, first so that genuine friendship can be developed, and second to get some idea of the atmosphere there. What people are at home is what they really are.
8. To keep regular communication. Phoning is useful; not everything needs to be done face-to-face. Email is helpful for keeping contact/communication, but never for communicating anything sensitive where tones of voice are essential.
9. To watch out for areas where people are not experiencing the victory of Christ. Might they need prayer in these areas?

#### **What should the disciple be seeking to do?**

1. To be as open as possible with the pastor about all aspects of life. Transparency, and genuine desire for accountability will make this easy for both!
2. To be real about areas of struggle in character, marriage or spiritual issues, and therefore to be willing to agree goals and strategies for overcoming in these areas.
3. To be a very good listener! (Is 50.4-5)
4. To be finding God's heart and vision for his/her own life, and therefore setting goals, with their pastor, to work towards this vision.
5. To submit all aspects of his/her life to the pastor, to allow them the ability to speak into anything they might feel it important to do so.
6. To agree with the pastor areas in which a faith journey is needed, e.g. areas of trusting God for finances, personal growth, family life, etc., so that the pastor can also be praying!

### **3. And finally...**

#### **Married couples**

Husbands pastor their wives. Make sure you as a pastor, or as a disciple understand this, and make sure others do as well! And note the following:

- A wife will respect a husband who is submitting properly to his pastor.
- A wife will respect a husband who is teachable and submissive himself.
- A wife will receive her husband's headship, care and direction if he also listens to her! There is a correct mutual submission.
- Never go over a man's head to talk to his wife without his permission.

#### **Care is delegated**

All pastoral care is delegated from the elders, who God charges with overall care for the flock.

Personal pastors do not need to have all the goods themselves for the people they pastor. Are there others who can help equip the disciple in different areas? Ensure good communication between all parties when added input is involved.

Confidentiality is important. But never allow yourself to be bound by confidentiality. You may need to share concerns with, say, elders, because they have overall care for the flock.

Beware of any wrong dependence that can enter into pastor/disciple relationships.

## **Don't be in a hurry to answer**

*"He who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame." (Proverbs 18:13)*

Pastoral counsel needs to be given carefully. The pastor's first aim is to find out what the disciple is hearing from God, or to help them to hear from God.

If a pastor feels the need to give advice, he must be sure that it is his responsibility to do so; within the measure of his experience and maturity; prayerful and considered.

## **The qualifications for pastoring**

1. Men/women after God's own heart. *This is primary!*
2. Who feed the Flock with Knowledge and understanding; *this takes both!*
3. They strengthen the weak; *this is challenging!*
4. They heal the sick; *this is merciful!*
5. They bind the broken; *this is compassionate!*
6. They gather the strayed back together; *this is patient!*
7. They seek that which is lost; *this is long suffering!*
8. They rule with love and kindness; *this is gentleness!*
9. They work in plurality; *this is safety and accountability!*
10. They know how to move their flocks and rest them; *this is wisdom!*
11. They count them into commitment; *this is to produce maturity!*
12. They have a relationship with their sheep because they know them; *this takes time!*
13. They, in turn, know him; *this also takes time!*
14. The shepherd calls them by name; *this is personal!*
15. The shepherd leads them; *this is directional!*
16. The shepherd provides proper pasture for them; *this is responsible!*
17. The shepherd provides protection for them; *this is fundamental!*
18. The shepherd lays down his life for them; *this is sacrificial!*

All of this you will find in the Scriptures: Colossians 1:27-28, Ezekiel 34, Jeremiah 3:15-16, Jeremiah 23:3, Jeremiah 33:12-14, John 10, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Peter 5, Mark 10:42-45, Hebrews 13:7 & 17.

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