



PRAY
FREELY



RAISE
PASTORS



GO
OUT



LEARN
ALWAYS



CHURCH
AS FAMILY

What's a Pastor?

At St John's we want to be very clear about this - the beautiful metaphor of 'shepherd' or 'pastor' (Latin for shepherd) is the best expression for Christian leadership possible. It is the place where a leader's prayers, thoughts and imagination should return to again and again for nourishment.

While there is usefulness in terms like 'leader', 'facilitator', 'enabler', 'visionary', 'delegator' or (insert any other contemporary leadership term) - these common-place expressions of leadership fall well short of the richness of being a 'pastor'.

The Lord is a shepherd (Ps 23, 89), Jesus is the good shepherd (Matt 9:35-38, Jn 10, Heb 13:20, 1 Pet 2:25, 1 Pet 5:4), appointed Christian elders are called to be shepherds (Acts 20:28), and all other Christian teachers are called to be shepherds (Eph 4:11).

There is no escaping this 'job title', in fact, it should be owned with enthusiasm. However, with a job title comes a job description. What is it? I hope to outline the role below in a few pithy phrases.

As with every job description, there are necessary limits to the role. We need to work these out, as a pastor that serves as though God is not a shepherd, and Jesus the chief shepherd, will over-function and be a poor pastor. That God and Jesus are other shepherds on the job should bring an immediate recognition that we are at most the third-best person in the pastoral room. Apart from that, there is the little fact that God and Jesus are omnipresent, where we can barely get to a single place on time. Our pastoring clearly has spiritual and natural limits.

Yet as with any job description, if you take the role it is to some degree because you are fit for it because some of your permanent character fits. And permanent character is always there. So this outline will also hope to point out what parts of being a 'pastor' never stop.

KNOW TO LOVE

Matt 9:35-38; John 10:11-18

Jesus 'saw' the crowd unlike others in Matt 9:35-38. Others saw a crowd, he saw an untended flock. He *knew* the sheep of Israel. In John 10:14-15 he says 'I know my sheep, and my sheep know me'. I once met a Zimbabwean pastor who worked on an English farm for a year to know what this means. Knowledge of others is so critical that Paul reminds us that one of the great things of seeing Jesus in the end will be 'knowing, even as we are full known' (1 Cor 13:12). Knowing enables love.

Why is knowledge of your sheep so important? Because you are called to love them. All ministry must be a ministry of love. Love is what last into eternity (1 Cor 13:13). It is the holy grail of all ministry.

We know our sheep in order to love them. Uninformed and impersonal love is theoretical and often misapplied. Love with knowledge is deeply effective.

‘We labor to be acquainted, not only with the persons, but with the state of all people....what are the sins of which they are most in danger, and what duties are they most apt to neglect, and what temptations are they most liable to; for if we know not their temperament or disease, we are not likely to prove successful physicians.’ (Richard Baxter, Reformed Pastor, 1655)

Our knowledge, however, has necessary limits. We are not a ‘knowing’ pastor everywhere or with everyone. The questions below seek to tease these limits out.

Q: What do you do in your ministry to get to know those you lead better?

Q: What are the dangers of knowing spilling over into unloving actions?

Q: What are the limits to your knowing people?

- a. Of a given individual?
- b. Of a circle of people (ie. how many can you reasonably pastor?).
- c. Are you a pastor when you are not at small group?
- d. Are you a pastor in church generally?
- e. Are you a pastor in your workplace?

Clearly, there are limits on ‘pastoring’. Love, however, which is a key qualification of any pastor, knows no bounds and is to be true of our lives everywhere – whether we are pastor or not.

FEED TO LEAD

John 21:17; Acts 20:25-31

Sheep need feeding, and sheep are such an excellent metaphor for God’s people because so do God’s people. Sheep feed on pasture, God’s people on His word. If all Christian ministry is exercised by love it is carried out by God’s word – His gospel & the scriptures which announce His gospel and its implications.

A solid read of Acts 20:25-31 will remind us of the necessity of truth for nourishment, so Paul did ‘not hesitate to proclaim to you the whole will of God’.

The word of God helps us understand not only God himself, but how we are to lead those under our oversight. Where are we taking them? Vision is found there. What do they need to attend to? God’s word will show them. Should you discern what to address by your observation of them - your best place to lead them to is God’s word to address that concern.

Your ministry is to be a ministry of reading and teaching God’s word. What could be worse than a ‘famine of hearing the words of the Lord’? (Amos 8:11)

We feed in order to properly lead.

Q: Does this mean every meeting is always a bible study?

Q: What temptations are there to let the word ‘go quiet’ in our little flocks?

Q: Do I know how to make a pastoral diagnosis of those I care for and lead them to God’s word?

It is also important to point out at this point that we feed ourselves in order to lead other people. Being a pastor is a significant responsibility in which some measure of other people's wellbeing is placed in our hands. (Matt 5:19; Matt 18:6) So Paul warns Timothy to 'watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourselves and your hearers.' (1 Tim 4:15-16)

Feed yourself too, so you might lead God's sheep. You may not be new to the faith, but you are to be being renewed in the faith (Col 3:9-10). A starving shepherd is of no use to sheep.

Q: What are the ways in which I feed my faith apart from leading others in the faith?

SEEK TO PROTECT

Luke 15:1-7, Acts 20:25-31

We seek to protect. I have wrapped up two quite different tasks here under one big idea. This makes ultimate sense - for sheep are vulnerable. If they are lost they are vulnerable and so the shepherd seeks them out. If they aren't lost they are still vulnerable, so the shepherd protects them even when they are 'in the mob'. Whether we are evangelising or discipling - we are looking out for vulnerable sheep.

First, seek. One of the marks of Jesus was that he looked reckless in leaving the ninety-nine sheep in the open country to chase the one. One of the marks of a pastors ministry is some 'going out' and 'seeking'. Whether we are chasing down the irregular, the straying, or the sheep that don't yet belong to the fold - we seek. No Christian ministry should not care about the unbelievers and the wandering. This is one of the hardest and most joyous of responsibilities. Teach the sheep to do the same - share your follow up and evangelism. It is not only the character of the shepherd, but the flock. But it must be the practice of the shepherd.

Seeking is protecting because the lost sheep is in grave and eternal danger.

Q: What evidence of 'going out' and 'seeking' is there in your life and in the life of your flock? How can this be altered or grown?

Secondly, protect returns as an action for the flock too. Paul says 'savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them' (Acts 20:29-30).

Protecting means guarding the truth, above all. We do this by 'rightly handling the word of truth' (2 Tim 2:15). We guard our flock by feeding them well. Heresy (unsound, distorted teaching) is a wolf. However, you may also be called upon to protect them from practical heresy - from abuse which distorts love into power, from self-medication which distorts medicine into ultimate comfort, from all sorts of harmful distortions that may mean a stern word, or a loving hug, or driving the streets at night searching, or calling the cops.

This is clearly stern stuff. Shepherds are made of stern stuff.

Q: What heresies (truth-distortion) have I had to ever protect God's people from?

Q: Some heresies are not in teaching, but in living, have I had to call someone back from a life-distortion?

Q: What are the limits of my protection of sheep – just my flock? The wider church? Any teaching I encounter?

PRAY

Finally, pastors pray. 1 Peter 5:2 reminds us that the flock under our care is God's flock, and Jesus is the chief shepherd. Breathe a sigh of relief. Your first and last pastoral act is to do nothing and hand it over to God and Jesus. Pray. Pray. Pray. This acknowledges you are not the best responder on the scene.

Q: How will I make myself accountable to praying for the sheep?

Now you know your job. Now you are probably feeling overawed. Not a single pastor worth their salt began caring for God's people without feeling utterly inadequate. It is the only place to begin.

Let us lay hands on you and pray for you as you seek to uphold these wonderful tasks of the shepherd.

THE SELF-IDENTIFYING 'PASTOR'

It is not uncommon for people to struggle to with the idea of being a 'pastor'. People don't mind 'shepherd'. Of course, they are the same word and the church has unhelpfully made pastors seemed like the paid people. I once counted 32 pastor sin my church, when I asked people to put up their hand if they considered themselves 'pastors', 16 hands hit the air.

Some people limit 'pastors' to the paid. (Most people do!) That is incorrect.

Some people limit 'pastors' to male elders, (Jeramie Rinne, *Church Elders*) I think that contains the metaphor too tightly.

Some people suggest that given the need to shepherd each other, *all* should be pastors. This is too much. Some people are better described as prophets or evangelists (see Eph 4:11) Others are just better described as followers. Not everyone is a pastor in a church – for not all know to love, feed to lead, and seek to protect, prayerfully.

Some have many of the marks of a pastor, but find their theatre of service is not the average church flock. Instead, it may be something like a hospital ward, or their local street, or their workplace. These people share much in common with pastors, but their role in feeding people God's word to lead them to maturity is not acknowledged by everyone they care for. People would be offended if they believed they had installed themselves as 'pastor' of the accounting department. These people are more likley a 'chaplain' (who is given a commonly acknowledged role by something other than a church), or more likely, an 'evangelist' (who need not be given anything by anyone!).

Not everyone is a pastor, but there are many more pastors than we usually acknowledge.

I would like you to work out what you need to acknowledge about yourself, with the help of others, and then feed that understanding by the scriptures, and live up to it.

I would like many more people, where appropriate, to identify themselves as 'pastors'.

NEXT STEPS: BIBLIOGRAPHY

Of course, this paper describes just the beginning of it all. It doesn't nurture the pastoral gift further. It doesn't deal much with structural realities of leading a small group at St John's.

The 'Learn Always' papers will give you plenty more to work on, but here are some obvious things to get under your belt quickly.

1. The Direction of Discipleship

This paper helps you diagnose your flock pastorally and plan next steps individually and/or corporately.

2. The Direction of Discipleship for a Group

This paper is to be done with your group and helps them think the same way - particularly focussed on people in relationships with your group who are not yet in church, or not yet Christian.

3. Divide and Multiply

This paper sets out an expectation we have not yet made clear - that you start building the unity of your group with a knowledge that if it is really healthy it will face a gospel division for the sake of multiplying the kingdom.

In order to nourish your gift further from the scriptures - why not do some wider reading on pastoral leadership?

Jeramie Rinne, *Church Elders*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

Col Marshall & Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*