

The Gift of Pastor

A gifted story: Bob has built up a library of devotional materials and spiritual works that have helped him in his faith pilgrimage. Over the years Bob has paid attention to his spiritual life, and he has a real sense of God's presence in all he does. You might say he is strong in the faith. Bob's special gift is that he is able to help other believers move along in their faith journeys by offering spiritual direction here and there. He often puts a favorite book into the hands of someone who might be helped by it. Sometimes he passes on a devotional audiotape. Bob is always on the lookout for a way to assist fellow pilgrims as they make their faith journey. He has the gift of pastor.

Biblical references:

Eph. 4:11 - It was he (Christ) who "gave gifts to mankind"; he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ.

1 Peter 5:1c-3 - I appeal to you to be shepherds of the flock that God gave you and to take care of it willingly, as God wants you to, and not unwillingly. Do your work, not for mere pay, but from a real desire to serve. Do not try to rule over those who have been put in your care, but be examples to the flock.

1 Tim. 4:12-15 - Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but be an example for the believers in your speech, your conduct, your love, faith, and purity. Until I come, give your time and effort to the public reading of the Scriptures and to preaching and teaching. Do not neglect the spiritual gift that is in you, which was given to you when the prophets spoke and the elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things and devote yourself to them, in order that your progress may be seen by all.

Definition and comment:

The gift of Pastor: the special gift whereby the Spirit enables certain Christians to assume a long-term responsibility for the spiritual welfare of a group of believers. It involves overseeing the spiritual lives of others and care for their spiritual needs by teaching and guiding them toward maturity. The believer with this gift will have the confidence, capability and compassion to provide spiritual leadership and direction for individuals or groups of individuals.

"Pastoring" comes from the Greek word "poimen." It refers to service in a caring, protecting, feeding and leading function. In the New Testament, the gift appears in connection with the work of elders, shepherds, overseers, and presbyters. Sometimes this gift is referred to as "shepherding", which is a near translation from the Greek. One who has this gift may be an ordained pastor; however, a person may have this gift and not be theologically trained or ordained. The person who has the gift of pastor must feed (Acts 20:28b), guide (John 21:16), and protect (Acts 20:28a) others, be a teacher (1 Tim. 3:2), give doctrinal instruction (Tit. 1:9), and enable others to mature in their faith. This gift can function in informal as well as official ways - in the role of counseling and spiritual direction to help others build a spiritual foundation for their lives.

Affirm that you have this gift; questions to ask yourself:

1. Are you concerned to see the spiritual needs of believers met and are willing to be personally involved in nurturing and discipling ministries?
2. Do you sense in yourself a shepherd's instinct when you know of Christians who need spiritual counsel?
3. Do you assume responsibility when you see a Christian being led astray?
4. Have you helped individual believers by guiding them to relevant portions of the Bible and praying with them?
5. Do you desire to care for the spiritual welfare of a group of young Christians, shut-ins, or people in pain?

Areas for study and personal growth:

1. Study scriptural examples of pastoring to see how the gift is exercised: John 10:1-18; Ezekiel 34:1-6,15; 1 Peter 5:1-11; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9.

2. Understand the context within which you will be able to exercise your gift of pastoring, and determine how best to utilize the gift - in an entire congregation or in a cell (a care group). Make a list of possible ways to minister using your gift of pastoring: visitations, counseling, Bible teaching, some new initiative to help others with spiritual direction.
3. Learn about the various discipling and spiritual direction programs that are available for churches, and develop expertise in helping people to deepen their spirituality and enhance their Christian lifestyle.
4. Seek ways to increase the opportunity for personal spiritual development of church members, and spearhead the implementation of programs that will promote spiritual growth and wellness (small group home meetings, prayer chains, retreats, renewal weekends, revival meetings, personal devotions and spiritual rule of life, pilgrimages, etc.)
5. Work on increasing your sensitivity to the spiritual needs of individuals. Participate in a listening workshop. Make known your availability for spiritual conversation, and then be available to meet pastoring needs that arise.
6. Build a library of spiritual literature that can be lent out to persons you are shepherding to help in their spiritual development. Take the time to discuss these materials with the person you are helping afterwards as the basis for spiritual conversation.
7. Read about shepherding to understand better what is asked for in a shepherd. One excellent book is *A Shepherd Looks at The Good Shepherd and His Sheep*, by Phillip Keller.

General ways to use the gift of pastor:

- Personally: strike up spiritual conversation with family or friends
- Within the church: become a youth counselor or spiritual director for a person who has that need (see more specific church service opportunities in the Booklet *Channels for Using the Gifts*).
- Within the wider community: conduct a jail ministry; volunteer for a child guidance clinic; lead a campus Bible studies group

For reflection:

Jesus called himself the “Good Shepherd” and he referred to us as his sheep. There is great comfort in knowing that he watches over us in that fashion. We know we can trust him to care for us and tend to our needs. If we follow him, we will not go astray, nor will we fall into danger. We recognize his voice and thus know whom to follow. But what if we did not recognize his voice? Perhaps we heard no voice at all or heard another voice, thinking that was the one to follow. What direction should we take?

We all need a solid spiritual foundation of knowledge and faith as well as the discipline to stay on the right path, lest we become lost in our lifelong spiritual journey. People with the gift of pastor, or shepherding, help us find our spiritual direction. This is a gift of gigantic importance that empowers people to assist others to make right choices, to find Christ, and to re-center their lives in a fulfilling Christian lifestyle. Obstacles to knowing God’s love are thus removed so that God’s peace can work its daily miracle.

You have a special calling to tend to the spiritual needs of your brothers and sisters in Christ. You will be a person whose inner love for Christ is reflected in your own devotional life, and that foundation will embolden you to give other believers the courage and motivation to continue on their own faith journeys. You will show us the way, and if we drift off course, you will be the one who will see it and urge us back on the correct pathway and help us recognize the true voice of the Good Shepherd.