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## AN INTRODUCTION TO PASTORAL CARE

*Bill and Denise Reynolds could not have been more excited. A church had actually selected them to be their parsonage family. Now, here came the rented truck, driven by an old friend, arriving with all their earthly possessions. A half dozen people from their new church helped unload their furniture and clothing into the parsonage next to the church. Then they carried boxes of books into Bill's tiny study.*

*After a long afternoon of hard work, Bill thanked all the helpers. Then he stood for a few minutes staring at the study door. There at eye level hung a black nameplate, announcing him to the world as PASTOR.*

*The reality hit him with such force that Bill walked around the old metal desk and collapsed on the ancient wooden swivel chair. From the time he was fifteen and felt the call of God, he had known this moment would come. He had completed his educational training, and once he fulfilled his required practical experience here at the church, he would be ordained for a lifetime of ministry in the Church of Jesus Christ. But now, sitting in his first office, Bill felt overwhelmed by a feeling of panic. What do I do now?*

*He knew he would have to prepare at least one sermon every week. That thought excited him. He always enjoyed letting a Bible passage come alive in his heart as he prepared to preach. But what will I do with the rest of the week, he thought? People in this congregation would be depending on him to help them face difficult situations. And what about those needy people out on the streets and in the homes near the church? They would need his attention too.*

*Some of the members who had helped with the unloading had called him Pastor Bill or Pastor Reynolds. He told Denise later he felt a bit uncomfortable with the title. It sounded so pretentious. He didn't feel more significant than anyone else. Deep down he wasn't sure he understood what it meant to be a pastor anyway.*

*The first thing that came to Bill's mind when he heard the title pastor was an image of a shepherd leaning on a staff while sheep grazed in clusters on a green hillside. That certainly didn't fit his suburban setting. His new church was surrounded by 2 million people. Even the idea of sheep was ludicrous. Bill smiled as he thought. A lost sheep in these parts would be cornered by the department of animal control if it weren't first flattened by a big rig on the freeway.*

*Perhaps the pastor-shepherd was simply a holdover from a simpler agrarian age. Perhaps Bill needed to see himself more as the chief executive officer over a*

*Christian organization or a spiritual social worker trying to help people through their difficult circumstances. As he was about to begin his ministerial career he realized he would soon learn the answer to this question: What does it mean to be a real pastor to people in the twenty-first century?*

### ► TODAY'S ROLE MODELS

It's safe to assume that most pastors want to have an effective, growing congregation. One may think that the easiest way to achieve that goal is to find a successful pastor or church and then copy the methodology. There are indeed many powerful images of ministry shaping the thinking of both the person desiring to serve a church and the congregation that will be served.

Who are the popular role models today?

### THE TELEVISION PERSONALITY

Perhaps the most significant influencer at the present time is television. A century ago a minister could gain national notoriety by publishing a book or writing a newspaper column. People today are using their eyes less for reading and more for watching. For some pastors, television has become a tool for building a church with international recognition. No longer do religious broadcasters try to buy expensive time on network television. Satellite television, with its ability to cover the globe with coverage, has spawned an abundance of large churches broadcasting weekly worship services to a worldwide audience.

However, such churches tend to cultivate a following of spectators who participate in isolation. Viewers may vicariously feel a part of the weekly celebration. However, they receive no personal encouragement, fellowship, or compassion from a television church that may be located thousands of miles away.

### THE MEGACHURCH VISIONARY PASTOR

Many young pastors become conference junkies, hoping that they will finally discover the secret ingredient that will cause their congregation to explode with growth.

There is no question that some megachurch pastors have altered the landscape of the evangelical church in North America. But most pastors fail to recognize the personal impact these visionary leaders exert on a specific community through their unique pastoral personality. It's impossible to simply clone Willow Creek Church in Prairie City, Nebraska, or Saddleback Church in Pleasantville, Vermont. Even with their large pastoral staffs and vast re-

sources, these superchurches face the constant struggle of finding effective ways to provide pastoral care for the people who are part of their congregations.

#### THE PULPIT GIANT

Some pastors and churches believe that the key to a growing church is a strong pulpit. They are convinced that if a minister can preach in a dynamic fashion, people will flock to the church. Pastors hear the recorded sermons of Chuck Swindoll, Thomas Long, or Haddon Robinson and say to themselves, *If I could only preach like that . . .*

Interestingly, pastors used to be called *Preacher* by members of the congregation. Not too many years ago people might ask when moving to a new community, “Where is the best preaching in town?” Today they ask who has the best worship music or who offers the best programs for children and youth. Many churches are starved spiritually because of the lack of biblical preaching. Every pastor needs to be willing to invest the time necessary each week in preparation to be the best preacher possible. And yet, preaching alone will not create a strong, healthy, caring congregation.

And last but not least—

#### THE PASTOR

The imagery of pastor as a valid model for ministry is again gaining acceptance after a period where the Church emphasized management and efficiency over caring and compassion. Today people, both inside and outside the Church, are becoming more interested in the importance of relating to others. Pastors both initiate and help facilitate those relationships within the Church.

The word *pastor* is not so much a title as a role—the role of being a shepherd to a flock of people. In fact, the word *pastor* comes from the Latin word *pascere* or *shepherd*. It means “to feed.” It suggests a holistic approach to ministry that is both ancient and contemporary.

The term *pastor* is only found one time in the New Testament scriptures to identify the person who takes on the responsibility of spiritual leadership for a local Body of Believers. Ephesians 4:11-12 says, “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be *pastors* and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (italics added). However, the metaphor of the Spiritual leader as a shepherd is found many times throughout Scripture.

Nowhere is the model for ministry stated more clearly than in the image Peter creates for us in 1 Pet. 5:1-4:

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: *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; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away (italics added).*

Notice Peter did not call them to be overseers, teachers, prophets, or evangelists. His primary metaphor for the elders of the local church was “shepherds of God's flock.”

Other world religions do not use the word *pastor*. Even the Jewish faith, which has a rich heritage built around the pastor-shepherd motif, does not refer to their rabbis in this way. The term *pastor* has become a uniquely Christian title for one in professional ministry. And yet it has been ignored by many who are looking for more contemporary icons. Various titles have been used across the centuries for those in Christian ministry, such as *elder, parson, preacher, minister, evangelist, clergy, priest, reverend, or chaplain*. But no name or title better describes the role and responsibility of ministry better than the term *pastor-shepherd*.

Pastor E. Glenn Wagner argues for a return to an emphasis on pastoral concern by the clergy.

Like Esau, we pastors have sold our biblical birthright as shepherds called by God for the pottage of skills and gimmicks designed by humans. We have misunderstood the role of pastor and defined it incorrectly. We have left our biblical and theological moorings.<sup>1</sup>

Another pastor, David Wiersbe, agrees with this new emphasis on pastoral concern. “Pastors need to be with people. Any approach to ministry that reduces or eliminates a pastor's contact with a wide cross section of the congregation is off the biblical path.”<sup>2</sup> Could it be that the best model or image for ministry today is still found in the biblical word *pastor*?

You cannot understand the role of Christian ministry without examining the life of Jesus. Thomas Oden says:

From the earthly ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, we learn the rudiments of Christian ministry. Jesus' vision and practice of ministry is significant for all Christian vision and practice of ministry. If ministry cannot be clearly established as the continuation of Jesus' own intention and practice, we lose its central theological premise.<sup>3</sup>

From Jesus' own identification as "the good shepherd" (John 10:11), to his example of compassion and concern for people in the gospel accounts, he provides an inspiring example of pastoral care. The subject of shepherding will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 6.

## ► THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF PASTORAL CARE

Early in the development of the primitive church in Acts the apostles appointed people to be set apart to lead local congregations. Paul lists the spiritual gifts given to those who would give leadership and direction to the church in Eph. 4:11-12: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." Robb Redman says, "The primary modes of pastoral care in the New Testament consist of mutual edification (*oikodomē*), encouragement (*paraklēsis*), and a mutual discipline (Matt. 18:15-17). The work of pastoral care is here recognized as the work of the whole people of God. . . . On the other hand, the New Testament also recognizes the unique calling of pastors, elders, and bishops, who are given a ministry of oversight and supervision."<sup>4</sup> The apostle Paul wrote the books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus specifically to instruct pastors and overseers how to care for people in the Church.

As the centuries passed, the Church continued to place an emphasis on the shepherding ministry. Second-century writers such as Clement of Rome, Ignatius, and Hermes wrote, defining the pastoral office. Tertullian, Origen, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom added instructions to pastors over the next two hundred years. By the fifth century the Church expanded across northern Europe and faced the challenge of Christianizing the barbarians. Pastors instructed their congregations to live out their Christian lives in compassion with one another in community, as an example to their unchristian neighbors. Pope Gregory the Great, in the sixth century, wrote a paper titled "Pastoral Care," in which he described the work of the pastor as offering moral and spiritual guidance to the church and also to the unchurched.<sup>5</sup>

During the Middle Ages pastoral care was often limited to dealing with the proper penance for committed sins. The Roman Church focused the energies of the clergy on administering the seven sacraments as the means to spiritual health. Although Francis of Assisi and Bernard of Clairvaux modeled both spiritual and physical ministry within the Church, this period of Church history was characterized by a lack of emphasis on pastoral care.

The Reformation brought a renewal of interest in pastoral care within the newly developing Protestant movement. Martin Luther strongly stressed the

priesthood of all believers, which made pastoral care the responsibility of the entire Church. Two important books came out of the early sixteenth century: Zwingli's *The Shepherd* (1524) and Bucer's *On the True Care of Souls* (1538). John Calvin and John Knox both emphasized the importance of the pastor caring for the spiritual needs of the congregation.

Richard Baxter's book *The Reformed Pastor* (1656) became the most significant development of the seventeenth century. His development of Puritan pastoral care became the standard for ministers in the Reformed tradition for centuries after. This tradition emphasized the introspection of conscience and strict adherence to proper moral actions. Baxter himself divided pastoral care into seven functions: "converting the unconverted, giving advice to inquirers, building up the believers, shepherding the families in the parish, visiting the sick and dying, reproving the impenitent, and exercising discipline."<sup>6</sup>

John Wesley took the gospel out of church buildings and into the streets and fields of eighteenth-century England. He became convinced that the laity should fulfill a major role in providing pastoral care. This was important because Wesley's itinerant ministry did not allow him to do ongoing personal care with his converts. Through Wesley's Methodist small group or class meetings people received the support and encouragement needed to live as believers. D. Michael Henderson states in his book *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*, "Wesley . . . so mobilized the entire Methodist membership that nearly every member had some share in the ministry of the congregation."<sup>7</sup> Tom Albin summarizes Wesley's impact this way: "In fact you could say that the whole Wesley revival was really a revival of pastoral care and guidance."<sup>8</sup>

As Wesley's movement came to the New World, lay pastoral care became an important element in the expansion of the Church out to the frontiers of the newly created United States. Circuit riding preachers could only visit small communities periodically, so the task of care and encouragement fell upon the members of those tiny Methodist and Baptist congregations. As the nineteenth-century camp meeting movement swept across the expanding American landscape, newly evangelized believers learned to care for one another out of necessity, since there were not enough pastors to fill the church pulpit in every village and hamlet.

The twentieth century brought more formalized training for those entering ministry. Many potential ministers began attending college and even seminary before pastoring their first church. These schools of higher education taught courses on pastoral theology and homiletics to complement the study of theology, Bible, and Church history.

The beginning of the twentieth century marked the beginning of a new field of study: psychiatry. Sigmund Freud is generally considered the most significant early influence in this new discipline, which attempted to study the mind in the same way medicine studied the body. It was not long before those in ministry preparation were introduced to concepts of psychology and mental health. Clinical pastoral education became a part of most seminary programs by the 1950s. Carl Rogers's book *Client-Centered Therapy* instructed seminarians in the nondirective approach to counseling.

In the last quarter century Christian counselors have begun to make their mark in the counseling field. Writers such as Gary Collins, H. Norman Wright, and Archibald Hart have written books read by pastors and laypeople alike. Christian psychologists offer seminars in churches on subjects ranging from how to raise children and have a happy marriage to overcoming depression or addictions. Many Christian universities and seminaries now offer graduate degrees for people seeking to be Christian counselors. Today it is not uncommon for large churches to hire Christian or pastoral counselors as staff members to serve the needs of both church members and those in need from the surrounding communities.

Small groups were rediscovered after World War II by parachurch organizations such as InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, the Navigators, and Campus Crusade as they began ministry to college and university campuses. In the 1970s innovators such as Lyman Coleman and Bruce Larson reintroduced the concept of small groups back again to churches. Many churches now offer specialized small groups to provide support for people with a common concern, such as addiction or loss.

Lay-led pastoral care has become an essential part of ministry in many large churches today. There are more people in a church of thousands than a pastor and staff can possibly serve effectively. Lay care, either through small groups or specific ministries, overcomes the limiting factor of having enough paid staff to meet the needs of everyone in the church. One of the benefits of care by the laity is the sense of fulfillment when members utilize their God-given gifts and abilities.

## ▶ PASTORAL CARE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In our opening story, Pastor Bill was overwhelmed by the task that awaited him as he began serving his first church. Perhaps it would be helpful to identify some of the terms connected with the pastoral role.

- *Pastoral ministry.* Everything a pastor does in connection with the church would be considered the ministry of the pastor.

This would include such diverse things as conducting board meetings, sermon preparation and delivery, promoting the missions program, leading a visitor to receive salvation, or driving a group of children to summer camp on the church van. Being a pastor is a lot like the farmer who steps out on the back porch each morning and realizes, in viewing the farm, there are fifty things he could do today, all of them urgent. Like the farmer, a pastor's ministry work is never done. Each pastor has some weekly routines, but there are enough unexpected challenges to keep the work from ever becoming dull or predictable.

- *Pastoral care.* Part of the task of ministry is pastoral care. Traditionally, pastoral care has included the activities of healing, compassion, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling people to one another and to God.

Thomas Oden, in his book *Classical Pastoral Care*, volume 1, *Becoming a Minister*, gives this definition:

Pastoral Care is that branch of Christian theology that deals with care of persons by pastors. It is pastoral because it pertains to the offices, tasks, and duties of the pastor. It is care because it has charge of, and is deliberately attentive to the spiritual growth and destiny of persons. Pastoral care is analogous to a physician's care of the body. Since that particular sphere over which one exercises care is the psyche . . . pastoral care is also appropriately called the care of souls.<sup>9</sup>

The term *pastoral care* may imply that the pastor is the only one who should do this work. While care is an important responsibility for a pastor, pastoral care can also refer to the compassionate shepherding concern any Christian can give to another person.

Pastor and author Michael Slaughter is intent upon helping laypeople discover such a ministry. He writes, "The call of God is not only for those involved in professional ministry. God has created every human being with a divine purpose. The greatest thing we can do for another human being is to help each person discover God's call."<sup>10</sup> In fact, a layperson with the spiritual gift of pastor may be much more effective as a caregiver than a minister without that spiritual gift.

- *Pastoral counseling.* Within the larger sphere of pastoral care is the task of pastoral counseling. Howard Clinebell, in his landmark book *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, defines the term this way, "Pastoral counseling, one dimension of pastoral care, is the utilization of a variety of healing (therapeutic) methods to help people handle their problems and crises more growthfully and thus experience healing of their brokenness."<sup>11</sup>

Within this broad field of pastoral counseling there are now many specialties, such as supportive care, crisis care, bereavement care, marriage enrichment, and family enrichment, to name a few.

The skills and techniques of effective pastoral counseling are quite specific and will not be addressed in this book. However, it is useful to comment on how pervasive the practice is. It is natural for people to come to a pastor for advice and counsel on spiritual matters. But these days the pastor's study is often the first stop when there are marriage problems, family conflicts, personal depression, or important decisions. No one asks a minister if he or she is interested in doing counseling. It's assumed today that pastors counsel.

Pastoral counseling is usually done in a limited time frame, focusing on a specific solution to a need. One reason people turn to clergy is because their counsel is usually free. Also, ministers do not restrict themselves to daytime office hours and thus are generally available anytime there is a crisis. In addition, people may feel that a pastor has greater insight into the will of God than a layperson.

- *Pastoral psychotherapy.* This is a very specific form of pastoral counseling, focusing on long-term therapeutic work done by a pastoral counselor with extensive training in psychotherapy. Because it is so technical and requires training and experience, it is beyond the scope of most pastors.

## ▶ A SHEPHERD FOR THE PRESENT AGE

Every age has to face a new set of circumstances that will influence the culture within and outside the Church. We have stepped over the boundary of one millennium and into a new one. And what we have discovered so far in this twenty-first century has been a mixed bag of peace and war, starvation and prosperity, safety and terrorism. The question on the minds of many in the Church is this: How can we “do church” in a way that can have a spiritual impact on the generation today?

More specifically for this book, how can we shepherd people who are facing the complexities of our stress-driven society? The words of a hymn written nearly two hundred fifty years ago by Charles Wesley keep coming back to my mind: “To serve the present age, / My calling to fulfill; / O may it all my pow’rs engage / To do my Master’s will!” (from “A Charge to Keep I Have”).

Serving the present age is different from serving the last one. Yet while society is rapidly changing and we're not always sure where that will lead us, basic human needs are the same.

Michael Slaughter writes, “America has been called the nation of strangers. One Gallup pole reported that four in ten Americans admit to frequent feelings of ‘intense loneliness.’ . . . By 2010 more than one in four householders will be single-parent homes.”<sup>12</sup> Even though family conflicts abound, people are seeking authentic, loving relationships with people who care. There is an increased in-

terest in spiritual reality, but people do not turn to the Church for the answers. With all our technological advancements, people have the same basic longings and desires that Jesus saw when he was here on earth.

The image of the pastor-shepherd serving in the twenty-first century is not an irrelevant one. People today are desperately looking for someone who will know their names and care about their hurts. The way you do that today may be somewhat different from someone pastoring a hundred years ago. Serving the present age means caring for people in meaningful, personal ways, using the same compassion and love Jesus showed during his ministry here on earth.

### ► PASTORS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

One of the early professional experiences that shaped my ministry took place during my seminary years as an associate pastor at College Church of the Nazarene in Olathe, Kansas.

The senior pastor, Paul Cunningham, received a phone call all pastors dread. A young couple and their beautiful little daughter were going away on a holiday trip to visit relatives. They were involved in a fatal accident on a Kansas highway.

As Paul and I rode down the road to the hospital we talked about the importance of a pastor being there when people need you. We entered the hospital room of the husband, Ron, with the news that his wife and little girl had not survived the crash. I observed how Pastor Paul seemed to know when it was appropriate to say words of encouragement and support, and when to simply stand at Ron's bedside as he wept and mourned the loss of his family. This was my first experience of walking with a man and his extended family through the planning of the funeral and the following months of grief work. I watched Ron as he found that his faith could help him through the toughest experiences life could throw at him.

Such moments are never easy for a pastor. You hurt with the family. There is also the responsibility of speaking a word from God at the funeral that will relate to the grieving loved ones and the larger church family. This can be a time of high stress and deep emotions. Yet, from that first experience of tragedy I learned that the pastor can make a difference. We stand humbly as undershepherds of that Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and at that moment become conduits or dispensers of God's grace. It is at once humbling and thrilling to be a pastor who cares for people in the name of Jesus.

▶ QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- ▷ Why is it important to understand that pastoral care has been a part of the biblical and historical record of the Church and not simply an invention of the Church in the last one hundred years?
- ▷ Why do people turn first to a pastor for care and counsel rather than to someone outside a church setting? What advantages and disadvantages do pastors have over other healing professionals?
- ▷ What do you perceive to be the most difficult aspect of pastoral care for the minister personally and for the pastor's family?
- ▷ What are some of the unique challenges to providing pastoral care in the twenty-first century?