

The Pastor

A fresh look at pastoral ministry

Stewart Keiller, May 2010

Expectations!

Its a function, a gift, a title, a personality type, a minefield! This word “pastor” is laden with hidden expectations from the people that give others the title. In some circles it carries huge honour and respect, in others it means that you are there 24/7 to be a comfort in crisis, in others it is the generic title of the clergy like vicar or Revd. For me I hear the word pastor and I feel that I am supposed to be a great listener and spend all day drinking coffee as people pour out their woes, all the life quickly draining out of me!

The purpose of this study is to align myself to the biblical meaning of the word pastor or shepherd and de-programme my understanding from the layers of meaning that seem to be put on this role. From a highly personal perspective, I want to assess my own pastoral ministry.

Love : Hallmark of the True Disciple

No matter how hard we may try, no one is exempt from pastoral responsibility. Scripture makes it clear that Love is the essence of the true disciple of Jesus. Love is an eternal decree by God “for the whole law can be summed up in one command : love your neighbour as yourself” (Gal 5:14, or as James calls it the “royal law” Js 2:8) - pretty clear! Even the Old Testament built in love for foreigners (Lev 19:34; Deut 10:19), God has always been concerned about how his people reflect his heart of love. Jesus teaches us to love one another (Jn 15:12), we are encouraged to “keep on loving each other” (Heb 13:1), “love each other deeply” (1 Pet 1:22), in fact loving God means loving our Christian brother and sisters (1 Jn 4:21).

Love is the very essence of the pastoral gift, it is the very essence of the Christian character, it is the very essence of God’s nature. God takes the initiative and loves us first (1 Jn 4:11) which should make it a bit easier to love each other - because I know the love of God then I can love others, we actually know what “real love” is - the love that Jesus showed us (1 Jn 3:16). The way we love each other becomes a key part of our mission, it is the very demonstration of the reality of the kingdom of God, we prove our true discipleship by our love (Jn 13:35).

So at a basic one on one level we are all called to care for, love and look out for each other. The gospel doesn’t leave room for us to pass on love, or to say that is the job of the professional lovers! Our characters need to be changed to reflect the character of God, that is the miracle of new birth - we get to start acting like God!

The Good Shepherd

Jn 10:1-21

Jesus is the Pastor

Our model of pastoring must be the great shepherd of all - Jesus. Any pastoral ministry must start from the premise that the heart of the shepherd is good. "I am the good shepherd" (Jn 10:11) says Jesus in his teaching on the subject. Unless we start with a fundamental understanding that God is good we get unstuck very quickly. When thinking about the role of pastoral ministry we must realise that the chief shepherd is Jesus himself. In thinking about reflecting the great pastor in our own lives, we must recognise that we are all pastors in one sense and not just sheep. We have a responsibility for each other. When God asked Cain where his brother Abel was he replied "am I my brother's keeper" (Gen 4:9) the answer is actually yes! If you see your brother in sin you are supposed to go and help him, if he has fallen into a pit we are supposed to get them out. Care is an essential role of every believer reflecting the heart of the Great Shepherd!

Pastors have to have good characters and motives

Although human "pastors" should exhibit characteristics of Jesus, we all should exhibit those godly traits. If the pastor is to be relied and trusted our focus MUST be Jesus and not the man with the title! Too often the "man" is elevated to the position of "Pastor" but it is actually to Jesus that we must be looking to have our needs met by. However, men and women are called into pastoral ministry and they should reflect the very nature of Jesus' pastoral ministry. Human pastors need to be "good" people, in their character and motive.

Pastors are those that live sacrificial lives

Jesus teaches us that a good shepherd is one who makes sacrifices for his sheep, Jesus was alluding to his death, the ultimate sacrifice is to lay down your life for others (Jn 15:13). Part of the shepherd's call is someone who is prepared to sacrifice himself for others, to put themselves out, to yield up their own agenda, to live for others. Don't think that they should be a push over, but sacrificial love is a hallmark of mature believers (1 Cor 13:13).

Pastor's Care

In Jesus' teaching the reason the hired help (the rent-a-shepherd) run away at the first sign of trouble is because they don't really care for the sheep that they have charge over, perhaps the sheep are a means to an end, perhaps looking after them is just a job not a passion or calling?

In Ezekiel 34 there is a stunning passage about good and bad shepherds. The passage is a prophetic criticism of the poor leadership shown by the Leaders of Israel. They leaders are condemned by God for satisfying their own needs before the needs of the people (v2), not attending to the sick (v4), not pursuing those that have wandered off (v4), being abusive, harsh and cruel (v4). God gives them a pretty harsh judgement. The picture of the good shepherd is one who

- searches for strays (v11)
- rescues sheep from dangerous places (v12)
- brings sheep home (v13)
- finds the sheep good safe places to feed and rest (v14-15)
- bandages the wounds of the hurting (v16)
- gets sheep strong in themselves (v16)

Ezekiel goes on to point the people to One Shepherd (v23), pointing the sheep to the great leader "my servant David" - Jesus!

Pastors bring stability and are trusted

Jesus goes on to clarify what he means by the word “good”. Good must include knowing the sheep, not really just a factual understanding, it is a much deeper knowing that that, it is an essential trust that exists between the sheep and the shepherd - on both sides. The sheep are not frightened or made to feel insecure by the shepherd, no they are secure when he is around and trust his motives. Ultimately people feel pastored when they trust the motives of the pastor! We have to start with a deep seated security that God is good and wants the best for us, God always has good intentions. When we understand the nature of God then God’s delegated authority to man can be understood. We will only feel humanly pastored if we trust the pastor!

Good pasture

Like good Fathers, a pastor needs to bring stability and security to the sheep. Jesus describes himself as “the gate” for the sheep to go in and out in peace and safety. Shepherding is not about constraint and limiting freedom, the shepherd is supposed to look for and lead the sheep to “good pastures”, you are pretty lousy shepherd if you take the sheep to some barren place with no food. What is the purpose of the shepherd? “My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life” - thats a lofty yet very practical aim. So if I begin to write a job description of the pastor what would we say so far?

- Pastors point people to Jesus
- The motive of the pastor is for the good of the people
- The pastor does not look to their own needs they look to the needs of others
- The pastor leads the people to safety and good places
- The pastor goes in search of the lost to rescue them
- The pastor is concerned with people getting healed up
- Pastors are trusted and bring security
- Pastors aim to release rich and satisfying life to others

The Pastor’s Voice

“The Sheep recognise his voice and come to him” (Jn 10:3).

Scripture uses the motif of the shepherd and the sheep many times to illustrate the life of discipleship. I am particularly struck by the idea that the sheep follow the voice of the shepherd, he calls them and they come. I suppose we would best understand that with the help of Shep the sheep dog - “come by” shouts the shepherd, and the dog rounds up the sheep! “They follow him because they know his voice” (Jn 10:4), the people need to know who the shepherd of the people is! Now of course we must immediately point people back to Jesus as the voice that we need to follow, but the role of the human pastor in the mix must have a voice to the people. I have noticed in all church life, that unless the voice of the pastor is clear the sheep find it hard to follow. So in churches where there is a clear leader it becomes easier because normally there is a clear voice, you may not like the voice and therefore go off to find a voice that you like, but clear direction is necessary for the sheep to follow. In a team context, the pastors (leaders?) must all be singing the same song, all be communicating the same heart and vision. So in a model of church the great shepherd must lead the sheep, the voice of the Holy Spirit must be evident, it is the role of the human pastor to communicate the sound of the Holy Spirit - perhaps the church leader is more like the sheep dog - yap yap!

Calls them by name

Remember the TV sitcom “Cheers” the place where everybody knows my name? Well according to Jesus teaching on the subject the pastor is able to call his sheep “by name

and lead them out". Now I must admit to struggling with people's names, I just about remember my families name let alone the 500+ people in the church! There is something vital for the individual identity about being known. When the quiet person who is unassuming is remembered by the shepherd, wow what a difference it makes. Belonging is when we are known. In Revelation the people of God carry the name of God on their foreheads (Rev 22:4), names carry destiny and purpose - being known is key. In every person is a need to be known and understood, it is the desire to matter, to have significance. When we tell our stories we are communicating something about ourselves, something about our characters, our identities. One of the aspects of pastoral ministry must be "knowing" people, knowing what is happening to them, knowing what is affecting them. Of course this is about making time for people - do we do that and is it realistic to be able to do that? Whatever sphere of care we offer, making to time to know people is vital.

Trust comes in time

What is it about the voice that brings the response of the sheep to the shepherd? It must be because the sheep are secure with the shepherd, he calls and the sheep come running. The sheep know that when the shepherd calls he will bring good things to them, give them food, look after them. The voice is trusted. This can't happen overnight, humans do not just trust in a minute, it takes time to trust others. I am generally a trusting sort of person but have been hurt a couple of times when is betrayed. We get to know the character of the person over time, so when something happens that is out of character or breaks trust, you know there must be good reason. If we essentially trust in the goodness of God, it is easier to obey him even when the command is difficult, obedience is easy when we understand why something is necessary. But when we don't understand then we need to trust in the nature of the person because of our past association with them. It is something that we need to consider in church leadership, people take time to trust, so raising up new leaders can and should take time. Trust is not an automatic right, but trust is essential for the community of God to function effectively.

Voice of Authority

"I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will guide you with knowledge and understanding". Jeremiah 3:15

I have always held the view that in Ephesians 4 the gifts of Pastor and Teacher are separate and have tended not to see them as pastor-teacher, one role I think not all pastors are teachers and certainly not all teachers are pastors (some teachers don't have a pastoral bone in their body!) Overseers are supposed to be able to teach (1 Tim 3:2), why? Well I think it is because that the shepherd or pastor must be a guide to the people, revealing God knowledge and understanding. There is a very clear and definite function for the people of God to receive life giving knowledge and understanding, actually the job of the pastor is to "release rich and satisfying life" to the people, it is to lead people to freedom not captivity, it is to communicate life giving treasure. Pastors are not about control and restriction but about freedom, true freedom within the security of the good pasture, that is why the sheep have to go through the gate! Pastors should reflect the boundaries set up by God, boundaries that help us live good and satisfying lives, but the goal is freedom. That voice of the Pastor calls to the sheep to freedom. When the shepherd speaks to the sheep they follow the voice because the shepherd is saying "over here people, there is a great place to graze, its safe, its lush".

So when the pastor steps up to the lectern to preach on a sunday what is happening? It is the shepherd's voice giving understanding and revelation of God. The shepherd is calling

the sheep to go in a certain way, to be guided to the place where there is food, peace and healing. I am increasing in my conviction that rather than pull away from the weekly gathered church we should maintain and celebrate the gathered weekly church. This is the place where so much happens, and we pull away from it at our peril. The gathered church is where the great shepherd speaks through the human pastor to guide the people. We have to discard the consumer mentality of church, we tend to consume the messages we like - no it is the job of pastor to guide the people in understanding and knowledge. "Don't give up meeting together" (Heb 10:25) is the command. The apostles well understood the importance of teaching the people, this was their pastoral mandate, they focussed the community of the people of God around their teaching (Acts 2:42) and later separated themselves off from the practical caring function to focus on teaching and prayer (Acts 6:2) to develop the shepherds voice. Does that mean they were not pastoral anymore, far from it, they understood the need to concentrate on the "voice". Once the sheep trusts the shepherd, all the shepherd has to do is speak and the sheep come. I am sure that when a new shepherd is introduced to the sheep it takes many months for the sheep to trust the new boy, but once they trust, then the voice becomes powerful.

So more to the job description

- Pastors know the names of people
- Pastors are trusted by the people
- Pastors need to spend time developing the voice that will lead the people

The Shepherd's Rod

"Your rod and your staff they protect and comfort me" Ps 23:4

The bishop walks down the aisle of the cathedral carrying a stylized shepherds crook, the sign that he is the shepherd of the people in his region. It is a symbol of authority as well as the essential tool of the shepherd.

Kings carry a rod called a scepter as a sign of the power they wield over their subjects, God's scepter is his righteousness (Heb 1:8), He has authority over his Kingdom. Moses was given a staff which he used to great effect to release the people of God out of captivity when it turned into a snake before Pharaoh and when it parted the red sea! The disciples were told to take nothing but a staff with them (Mk 6) when they went out on their practice mission trips. The rod carries weight and significance, a physical sign of authority.

When it comes to the shepherds rod, the stick is used to prod the sheep to tell them that you are there (comfort) and the slap to bring the sheep into line (protect). Authority given to leaders is both for the purposes of comfort and protection when it is in the hand of a shepherd motivated out of love. Give the rod of authority to a wounded leader, a controlling leader, an insecure leader and he will use it to abuse the sheep - whack, get in line!

Any delegated spiritual authority given to the pastor of the church has to reflect the heart and motive of the great shepherd of the sheep! You can use the rod as an instrument of control or to bring freedom, it is not meant to control but rather to release! One of the misunderstandings of leadership or spiritual authority is that the leader is somehow going to tell the individual what to do, or control them in some way. The true leader/pastor wants the best for the person, the job is to help them make better decisions so they can be more fruitful. Obedience is not about being controlled it is about trusting.

So our job description...

- Pastor's carry authority to release freedom to the people

Pursuing the ONE

Matthew 18:12-14

The disciples liked to jostle for the affections of Jesus and often asked him questions like "who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" hoping that Jesus would pick them. Jesus was at pains to point to the weak, the small, the child as examples of kingdom life. Then he tells them the story of the shepherd that has a flock of 100 and one of the sheep strays off and gets stuck in a ditch. The shepherd, doesn't just say "oh well silly sheep, I've got one less now", no he leaves the 99 and goes after the 1. The pursuit of the ONE is a key principle of pastoral ministry, and reflects the heart of the Father. We could get all hung up on making sure that everyone in the church gets ministered to, looked after, cared for - I think we are missing the point! Go after the one. As the church grows (which it should) it gets impossible to care for everyone equally, actually our job is not to care for everyone equally, our job is to "release rich and satisfying life". Some people need very little pastoral care because they have got the revelation, they realise that Jesus is the shepherd that cares for them, they have got the means now to feed themselves, they understand who they are in Christ - they don't need someone constantly watching over them - its nice once in a while to be thought of, to be told they are important but in the main they are mature disciples of Jesus. No the efforts of the pastor must surely be to go after the ONE. The person that is on the verge of giving up their faith, the person in the grip of addiction, the lonely, the single parent. You can't help them all but you can go after the one. Pastoring the one is no a profession it is the call of biblical discipleship. What if we all went after ONE - we would express the heart of the Father that one, which becomes many.

add to the job description

- The pastor thinks about people ONE at a time!

The Pastoral Function in Church

We have built up a bit of a picture of the pastoral ministry from scripture. I am not pretending that this is exhaustive, but hopefully it brings a fresh perspective.

- Pastors point people to Jesus
- The motive of the pastor is for the good of the people
- The pastor does not look to their own needs they look to the needs of others
- The pastor leads the people to safety and good places
- The pastor goes in search of the lost to rescue them
- The pastor is concerned with people getting healed up
- Pastors are trusted and bring security
- Pastors aim to release rich and satisfying life to others
- Pastors know the names of people
- Pastors are trusted by the people
- Pastors need to spend time developing the voice that will lead the people
- Pastor's carry authority to release freedom to the people
- The pastor thinks about people ONE at a time!

In terms of how it works in practice in the church is the crunch. What is very limiting is for The Leader to be The Pastor. Number one, the Pastor is Jesus! We must be clear that our focus is to lead people to Jesus as the great shepherd and not draw people to ourselves, the minute we do that is the minute we put ourselves in the place of Jesus and we are going to get exhausted and become indispensable to the life of the individual. In all our pastoral ministry we must point people to Jesus.

Local church government seems to be in the hands of “overseers”, “elders” and “deacons”, supported and equipped by apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists, generally called Ephesians 4 ministries (4:11). Sort of a matrix style leadership structure, although the apostles also tended to be elders and overseers as well.

Now I don't want to get too hung up on the detail of church government, the church has been pretty divided in history over the way in which it interprets these scriptures, my own conviction is that scripture is not prescriptive about church government for good reason, we are supposed to get the principles and apply them to the culture of the places in which we live. What we can conclude is that there was leadership in the church, there was clarity, it was plural (not many one man bands), the leaders did have authority over the affairs of the church.

Elders got appointed in all the churches that were planted by the early church. They were on Jerusalem and met with the apostles to decide matters of great importance (Ac 15:2). They were to be honoured (financially where appropriately), some clearly taught the word of God, and were to be recognised after time (1 Tim 5:17-25). Paul told Titus to put elders in every church, they should be good upright people (Tit 15-6), able to pray for sick people (James 5:14), and of course “shepherd the flock of God” (1 Pet 5:2). We have a great description of the shepherding of the flock, not doing for personal gain, not lording it over people, but being an example. So maturity is important. The sense we get from the description of elders is that this was not a huge responsibility, probably people who looked out for a household of people would have been elders?

Overseers are often referred to as the same as elders. This is possible that they are the same mainly because in 1 Pet 5:2 the elders are to serve as “overseers” of the flock. However, I think that although the roles overlap in function they are different, and that is why the NT uses two different words to refer to them, church history would also support this view as bishops (the same word as overseer) became synonymous of a shepherd with wider responsibility. The qualifications of the overseer are similar to the elder but more of the same. Temperate, sober minded, able to teach, hospitable, doesn't drink too much alcohol, not a greedy person, not a youngster (1 Tim 3:1-7, Tit 1:7-9). The key difference seems to be the sphere they operate in, they are the ones who are supposed to make sure the word is being preached properly, keep sound doctrine (Tit 1:9). The early church made a point of holding to the apostles teaching (Acts 2:42) this was probably the job of the overseer.

Deacons are servants, they are those given to the support of the ministry. In Acts 6 deacons are appointed to take on the task of the food programme, one of them was Stephen, what a great guy he was! They too should be trustworthy and good people (1 Tim 3:8-13).

Jethro's Suggestion

In practice it doesn't matter all that much how the church is structured but there is a sense of levels of responsibility. If we overlay Jethro's advice to Moses (Ex18) onto the map of

the new church I think we get some clarity. Moses was told to divide the people up into 10's, 50's, 100's and 1000's, and appointed "elders" who were to exercise different measures of responsibility.

The sphere of the person looking after 10 is that of the active discipler, the father figure, the one that intimately knows the other person. Jesus had a 10, well a 12 actually, it is the investment of one person to another. Don't get stuck on the actual number, it is really saying small units, you can have a 10 which is 3 people or a 10 which is 20 people, the point is a small group. Perhaps these are deacons, perhaps just disciplers, but they will have a measure of authority, more involved and acquainted with a smaller group of people.

The 50's is the remit of the elder? You can know 25-75 people, but not intimately. One of the reasons most churches stay at this mid size is because it is in the grasp of one person to know all those people. This would be our mid sized community, or as I would like to call them "community elder" to denote authority or responsibility.

The 100's are a much larger responsibility and the 1000's even bigger. This is the role of our overseers. The overseer is to look over a much wider group. Of course you can't know them all, but have responsibility for the welfare of all the groups in their charge, relying on 50's and 10 leaders to deal with a lot of the issues.

The 1000's represent the wider group, perhaps this is a senior overseer or even an apostles remit to take charge of a wider group. You can't possibly know 1000 people - the role is hugely different.

ALL the functions are pastoral although some will carry more pastoral gifting than others the care shown at each level is different. No one gets let off the hook from caring, it is a key trait of the believer. At the smallest unit (10) they need to care for the people!

Ephesians 4

Just a word about the ephesians 4 ministry team. They clearly are to EQUIP people. Each represents a gift that is needed in the church, but not necessarily in every local church. I would suggest that the bigger centres should have all the gifts/offices available. So a local leader of a church may well be a pastor or teacher as their gift, but they may also be an evangelist. There does seem to be an order in scripture "*And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.*" (1 Cor 12:28) although this list doesn't exactly tie up with the Ephesians 4 list! Apostles and prophets are described as the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20) and are charged with all matters of importance, doctrine, direction and establishing the church.