

The Shepherding Pastor

Psalm 23:5

...You anoint my head with oil...

Luke 10:34

He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.

The search for becoming a successful minister in a successful ministry appears to be a fundamental task to all ministerial fields of study. The answer to that quest is allusive in that the remedy changes with the symptoms. The body of Christ appears to go through phases where the weakness in the church changes. The problem with the ministry, during that phase, is prognosticated and the diagnosis is proclaimed. Then an antidote is developed and administered across the country like a vaccine. The church, as it has for generations, works its way through its weakness to renew its strength. The next phase for the church arrives and the process is repeated. In this manner, the role of ministry and the focus of the pastoral task changes with each phase. The search for being spiritually successful can become an enigma in this form of evolutionary ministerial development. The quest still exists, “how do I become a spiritually successful minister?”

The role of the minister is compared to that of the shepherd throughout the scriptures.

Shepherd:

Jesus the True: Foretold, Gen. 49:24; Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:23; 37:24. The chief, 1 Pet. 5:4. The good, John 10:11, 14. The great, Mic. 5:4; Heb. 13:20. His sheep he knows, John 10:14, 27. He calls, John 10:3. He gathers, Isa. 40:11; John 10:16. He guides, Psa. 23:3; John 10:3, 4. He feeds, Psa. 23:1, 2; John 10:9. He cherishes tenderly, Isa. 40:11. He protects and preserves, Jer. 31:10; Ezek. 34:10; Zech. 9:16; John 10:28. He laid down his life for, Zech. 13:7; Matt. 26:31; John 10:11, 15; Acts 20:28. He gives eternal life to, John 10:28. Typified: David, 1 Sam. 16:11.

Shepherd:

One who cares for flocks, Gen. 31:38–40; Psa. 78:52, 53; Jer. 31:10; Amos 3:12; Luke 2:8. David the, defends his flock against a lion and a bear, 1 Sam. 17:34, 35. Causes the flock to rest, Psa. 23:2; Song 1:7; Jer. 33:12. Numbers the flock, Lev. 27:32; Jer. 33:13. Knows his flock by name, John 10:3–5. Keeps the sheep and goats apart, Matt. 25:32. Waters the flocks, Gen. 29:2–10. Keeps the flocks in folds, Num. 32:16; 1 Sam. 24:3; 2 Sam. 7:8; John 10:1. Watch towers of, 2 Chr. 26:10; Mic. 4:8. Dogs of, Job 30:1. Was an abomination to the Egyptians, Gen. 46:34. Angels appeared to, Luke 2:8–20.

From this biblical analogy the role of the shepherd, and thus the minister, can be depicted into four main categories: one who guides or gives direction, one who enables growth through feeding and watering, one who protects the flock from without and within, and one who helps mend the wounds of the flock or congregation. The ministerial task, however allusive it may appear, should be contextually extrapolated from these fundamental responsibilities. My struggle in developing a biblical model of a pastor has been in establishing a relationship that will facilitate the process of mending wounds. A part of the ministerial role is to be able to help the healing process of the congregation. My goal is to develop a healthy relationship where my congregation can say, “I need you to help heal my wounds. I know the process will hurt me, but I trust you.”

The problems that ministers face on a regular basis usually distract them or are a hindrance to their efforts in fulfilling the four main roles of a pastor. The majority of the problems affect the relationship between pastor and congregation. Some of the problems can be avoided if there are established healthy relationships. Others are unavoidable, but could have a healthy outcome if there is a healthy relationship. I believe in every instance there is the possibility not only to damage the relationship further, but also to strengthen the relationship through the tension of the conflict. Thus the quest for establishing a biblical model for successful pastoral ministry becomes entwined with relationships development.

A main challenge to a healthy pastoral relationship is in dealing with conflict. A pastor will have to engage in conflict with every effort of ministry. Every relationship that exists in ministry involves the pastor either directly or indirectly. The conflicts that involve the pastor directly include personal encounters with individuals as well as with groups. These conflicts between the pastor and congregation can arise at any moment and range between which direction the parking lot stripes lay to the vision statement of the church. Other indirect conflicts that draw the pastor in are those such as arbitrating a conflict between two members or two clichés. Still there are other conflicts that arise between the pastor's family and a congregation that are probably the most trying of all. In these areas the pastor not only has to deal with the conflict between the initial parties, but the friends and families of those involved as well.

Another challenge to the pastoral ministry is in the perception of availability. Availability takes on a different definition with each parishioner. To some, being available means keeping respectable office hours and being present at all church functions. To others it is in the pastor's awareness of their life situations and how often the minister is present at those moments of crisis. And to some it is in how well a pastor relates to them while he preaches on Sunday morning and if they get a handshake on the way out. These varied definitions of availability boil down to how each parishioner views the pastor's interest in their life. If they feel like the pastor is concerned with their well being then they are more receptive to the ministry. If their perception is that the pastor is too busy for them or that they are overlooked then there is a slight barrier to be breached in order to minister effectively. A minister can not cater to the microscopic desires of each member in a congregation; however, a sense of being available to the congregation is necessary in order to minister on a more personal level.

Discipleship is another challenge to the effectiveness of ministry. A minister has to be able to correct a congregation as well as individuals in order to help them mature in their Christian walk. The need for correcting false doctrine or poor living practices can not go unattended. How well a pastor can correct a congregation is directly related to how much trust and confidence he has won in their lives. Once again relationship development is seen as a pivotal point in the forward progress of ministry. For a pastor to overcome an individual's emotional tie to something such as folk theology or to be allowed a glimpse into an individual's living practices for discipleship purposes, a relationship must first be established that will facilitate that purpose. That relationship has to be one of earned trust. Discipleship can be accomplished

Finally, for a pastor to be able to ministry to an individual's intimate spiritual needs, that individual must choose to allow the minister access. The hidden needs that lay beneath the façade of everyday living must be breached. It will not suffice to only preach inspiring messages and maintain programs of numerical growth. The pastor, as describe metaphorically in the scriptures, must be able to mend the wounds of the congregation. These wounds sometimes are visible for all to see, yet many lay hidden beneath thick layers of wool. How does the pastor develop a spiritually successful ministry? This is accomplished when the congregation accepts the pastor as the one being used by God guide, provide, protect, and be a part of the healing process in their spiritual lives.