



The tribe of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do

Issachar Ministries UK seeks to be a people who understand the times, listen to the Lord and know what should be done

Resourcing for Prayer Network

SPIRITUAL GUIDELINES (15)

Pastors and Pastoring

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Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)

*'So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, **the pastors** and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.'*

The Importance of the Pastoral Role

The pastoral ministry was given by Christ so that those who are gathering together are properly cared for so that they too can operate well - and this is the primary concern of those called in this way to be part of the leadership within any community.

Pastors are concerned with relationships both within the group and outside, and need to be supportive and caring for others - putting the needs of others above their own and nurturing them so that the whole body is effective. Pastors are often likened to shepherds - and can be good or bad. They support and care for the flock under their care and give unity and cohesion to the group.

The need for pastors, leading and caring for communities of believers, was easily recognised by the early church and this role was elevated down the centuries into the main role (combined with teacher) in any community. In fact for many years the leadership role of pastors and teachers dominated the church structures - some say they even 'hi-jacked the Church' as other roles faded into the background. They are now needing to re-find their rightful place within many Christian communities as part of a team as other roles are brought back into prominence. The roles of pastors and teachers each need to be seen as working together in teams with evangelists, prophets and apostles.

Pastors and Shepherds

Despite the size of a community they all need at least one person with a pastoral gift and role. Without a shepherd the sheep are *'harassed and helpless'* (Matthew 9:36) and compassion is a key quality needed (Mark 6:34). Isaiah prophesied that a shepherd for the nation Israel would come out of Bethlehem (7.14). Matthew picks this up (2.6) when Herod was querying where the Christ was to be born which emphasised the importance of those who are in the world's eyes the lowliest. The first to hear the message of the incarnation were shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem (Luke 2:8 - 20) and they received the message with joy.

Jesus is often called the Good Shepherd and he used parables to highlight the difference between the Good and the Bad shepherd in order to teach his disciples how shepherding should be used.

We need to understand the difference between the way in which shepherds operated in Jesus' time and the way they do in the West today. 'Heavy shepherding' where concern for people is translated synonymously into control and discipline has given the term a bad name in many communities.

Eastern forms of shepherding led from the front - the shepherds did not drive from behind with dogs! The shepherd would go on ahead to prepare the way and find good pastures. When Jesus was speaking about leaving this world he spoke about going ahead to '*prepare a place for you*' (John 14:2) and then being with us in this perfect place. On other occasions he teaches about the shepherd caring so much for those he was protecting that he would lay down his life for them (John 10:11).

The Good Shepherd knows his sheep, he calls them by name and they know him (John 10:14), he enters by the gate openly and not in another way (John 10:2).

Pastoral Role

Acts 20:28 equates pastoring with overseeing and caring for others as a spiritual gift '*Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood*'. 1 Peter 5 2-6 spells out even more clearly your responsibilities if you have others under your care. You are to '*watch over them willingly, not grudgingly-not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example*'.

This was a new understanding of leading in the early church. It was unknown in Judaism where the rabbis did not have that kind of responsibility. Even today I have had rabbis bemoaning the fact that they are reduced to being 'kitchen inspectors' ensuring that rules are kept.

Pastors to the Pastors?

It is natural that the pastors themselves need pastoral cover - no-one can survive on their own without being part of the body. In addition to the whole question of accountability, everyone needs someone to share problems and insights with and to assist them in their ministry. Many independent churches find this within the body, or search for others - or it is non-existent. But in the 1st and 2nd centuries churches began grouping together and developed and established a pattern of organisational hierarchy whose main role became administrative and policy decision-making which may have produced unity in doctrine but lost the pastoral distinctive. More about Overseers and Bishops at another time but it may be useful to read the rules Paul sets out in 1 Timothy 3.1-7 which gives a good overview for any leader. In the end if the 'flock' do not value the pastoral role they are receiving then they scatter and discord sets in.

Penalties for Neglect

If the shepherd is struck down or neglectful, '*the sheep are scattered*' (Matthew 26:31) and (Mark 14:27). We are reminded that if we do not enter the sheepfold by the gate we behave like thieves and robbers (John 10:1) and being '*hired*' to care for the sheep also has problems for all! '*The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it*'. (John 10:12).

Jude 1:12 condemns the selfish bad shepherds '*These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm - shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted - twice dead*'.

Pastoral Fulfilment

Pictures of the pastoral scene show everything calm and under control - and it is clear that these show good pastures and should be sought after. There are three letters in the New Testament from Paul towards the end of his ministry often called the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus). Here as an old man who is concerned (out of love for others) to give good advice to them on how these new churches (already under persecution) could walk well with the Lord.

We should all have a desire to look beyond our own gifting and see everyone fulfilled in their calling. Pastoral gifts are not limited to just one person in each fellowship but can be exercised most effectively in teams of people all of whom will put the needs of others above their own needs. The joy and fulfilment they then receive here on earth is to see others being blessed and fulfilled.

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