

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

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In the Bible the Pastoral Care Ministry of the church is called shepherding. (John 21:16 [*poimaine*, take care of]; 1 Peter 5:2 [*poimante*, shepherd])

- “Again Jesus said, ‘Simon son of John, do you truly love me?’ He answered, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Take care of [Shepherd (NASB)] my sheep.’” (John 21:16)
- “shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;” (1 Peter 5:2 NASB)

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

Pastoral care involves four main functions.*

1. Healing
2. Sustaining
3. Guiding
4. Reconciling

- Each of these four main functions of pastoral care are accomplished on different levels of need.
- Pastors and other trained leaders should attend to the most severe forms of need in each of these four areas.
- But caring Christian friends can provide helpful follow-up shepherding care in addition to pastors' care for the most serious matters and sufficient care for less serious matters.

*See Ronald J. Nydam, "Good Shepherding" in Calvin Seminary Forum, Vol. 21, No. 1, Winter 2014, pp. 3-5.

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Pastoral Care: **Healing**

- Showing up: a personal visit.
- Listening.
- Heartfelt empathy.
- Communicating: orally and, as appropriate, by touch (e.g., hug).
- Quoting in conversation and reading God's Word.
- Praying with and for the friend.

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Pastoral Care: **Sustaining**

- Sharing pastorally sensitive sermons related to the person's situation.
- Listening carefully to the friend's complaints.
- Sharing Scripture from the heart and the written Word, especially texts related to the friend's struggle, e.g., worry, guilt, loneliness, doubt, illness, or broken relationship.

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Pastoral Care: **Guiding**

- Discerning spiritual direction, choosing the right path.
 - Gentle persuasion, compassionate urging to do something for the Lord's sake and for the friend's good.
 - Admonition when wrong has been done, especially sin. (2 Timothy 3:16, Ephesians 4:15)
- + Compassionate questions from a fellow sinner engaged in lifelong learning are helpful ways to offer such corrective feedback.

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Pastoral Care: **Reconciling**

- Building bridges and facilitating the healing of broken relationships
 - + in marriage
 - + in families
 - + in friendships
 - + in church
 - + with God
- “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation....” (2 Corinthians 5:18)

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

Delegation of Ministry

- Ministry properly done is more than the pastor can do by him or herself.
 - Ministry throughout the Bible has been delegated by leaders.
 - One important way the pastor provides care for Christ's sheep is by helping other believers serve as vessels through whom the Holy Spirit will bless the Lord's people in the ways they can.
- Delegation in the Old Testament
 - + Deuteronomy Exodus 18:17-26
 - Delegation in the New Testament
 - + Acts 6:1-4
 - + Galatians 6:2
 - + 2 Timothy 2:2

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

- All members of the church have caring needs.
- A pastor can meet with members of the church when a member has an especially difficult problem, but
- pastors cannot meet to care for every member's needs that are common, or even with some difficult but chronic challenges.
- Such caring can be done by others in the church:
 - + Elders and deacons where applicable to their calling and office.
 - + Specially trained lay ministers, e.g., Stephen Ministers.
 - + Christian friends—often their help is enough without the pastor.

Common and Chronic Needs Church Members Can Care for (Shepherd) Other Members:

- Conflict resolution
- Depression
- Family problems
- Grieving
- Illness, temporary
- Illness, terminal
- Marriage problems, disharmony
- Relationship problems with others
- Stress
- Substance abuse, addiction
- Work problems

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What Does He or She Do?

- Views this ministry as ongoing and long-term.
- Visits regularly with the friend in need.
 - + Asks the friend how often he/she would like to visit and where, e.g., in the friend's home? In a restaurant? Elsewhere?
 - + Working on a project together (e.g., knitting, repairing a car, playing ping pong) facilitates helpful, caring conversations.
- Listens a lot.
 - + Responds to statements with understanding and compassion.
 - + Considers nonverbal communication (e.g., looks for frowns, tears, sighs)
 - + Takes into account what is not said.
 - + Looks for indications of stress and distress.
- When necessary and when the time is right, when a relationship has been established, offers suggestions mostly when requested but does not avoid encouragement that includes admonition. (Romans 12:8; 2 Corinthians 2:7; Colossians 4:8; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)
 - + Is mostly concerned with what God thinks about the matter.
 - + Doesn't make the mistake many do and avoid talking about difficult matters, due to failure to discern points where psychology conflicts with the Bible and a desire to be liked; i.e., is more concerned for the other's well-being and God's will rather than his or her own comfort level.
- Prays with and for the afflicted person.

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

How Is Such a Ministry Developed?

What Needs to Be Done

1. Provide awareness of the need.
2. Provide training.
3. Provide encouragement and support.

How to Do What Needs to Be Done

1. Sermon, Newsletter article.
2. Hold a class.
3. Encourage people who are doing well such caring with others to help others to do so.
4. Start a small support group. Include short presentations by members who have done and/or are doing such caring well.

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

- In your congregation, how will you facilitate the development of such a ministry among the people in your congregation?