

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

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Biblical Bases for Pastoral Care

- “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2)
- “...so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same care for one another.” (1 Corinthians 12:25 NASB)
- “...even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.” (Galatians 6:1)
- “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.
¹⁷And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Colossians 3:16–17)

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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

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

- 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.

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1. **Healing**
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4. Reconciling

Pastoral Care: **Healing**

- Show up: a personal visit.
- Listen carefully.
- Offer heartfelt empathy.
- Communicate: orally and, as appropriate, by touch (e.g., hug).
- Speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15)
- Quote in conversation and read God's Word.
- Pray with and for the friend.

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Pastoral Care: **Sustaining**

- Listen carefully to the friend's complaints. Engage in conversation about the matters raised by the friend.
- Share 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.
- Share pastorally sensitive sermons related to the person's situation.

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Pastoral Care: **Guiding**

- Discern spiritual direction, choosing the Biblical path.
- Offer gentle persuasion, compassionate urging to do something for the Lord's sake and for the friend's good.
- Offer 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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4. **Reconciling**

Pastoral Care: **Reconciling**

- Build bridges and facilitate 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:

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

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

What Does He or She Do?

- View this ministry as ongoing and long-term.
- Visit regularly with the friend in need.
 - + Ask the friend how often he/she would like to visit and where, e.g., in the friend's home? In a restaurant? Elsewhere?
 - + Work on a project together (e.g., knitting, repairing a car, playing ping pong) facilitates helpful, caring conversations.
 - + Talk about subjects the friend wants to discuss. Let him or her initiate the subjects.
 - + If awkward silence occurs, ask a non-threatening open-ended question that the other person can respond to as he or she wants.

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

What Does He or She Do?

- Listen carefully.
 - + Listening and demonstrating understanding about what the other person is saying facilitates the other person's receptivity to what you want to say. That phenomenon is sometimes called "earning the right to be heard."
 - + Demonstrate understanding by such means as:
 - Asking, "Do I understand correctly that you are saying...." then repeat verbatim or in your own words what you heard the other person say as closely as possible to what he or she said.
 - Converse about the subject as long as the other person desires. Don't change the subject before he or she is finished.

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

What Does He or She Do?

- Listen a lot and caringly, intently, with genuine interest.
 - + Respond to statements with understanding and compassion. For example, if the other person has stated a bad experience he or she has had, say (in your own words), “Wow! That sounds painful; I can’t imagine what that must have been like.” That reply welcomes and will likely motivate him or her to say more. If not, and if a pause develops, you could then ask [without prying and letting the other person change the subject], “How are you doing with that matter now?” If the other person doesn’t respond, or just shrugs his or her shoulders, let a pause develop. Be comfortable with the silence; it facilitates further reflection and conversation. If the pause continues beyond productive reflection, ask a question that changes the subject.

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What Does He or She Do?

- Listen a lot and caringly, intently, with genuine interest.
 - + Consider nonverbal communication (e.g., look for frowns, tears, sighs)
 - + Take into account what is not said.
 - + Look for indications of stress and distress.
- If you are talking with a person who has just lost a spouse or other dearly loved one, offer suggestions from the PowerPoint program, [“Managing and Overcoming Grief: By God’s Word and Prayer without Ceasing”](#) and related resources on these Websites:
 - + <https://fromacorntoak12.com/pastoral-care-2/>
 - + <https://seelyedward.academia.edu/research>

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What Does He or She Do?

- When necessary and when the time is right, when a relationship has been established, offer suggestions mostly when requested but do not avoid encouragement that includes admonition. Raising relevant and related questions helps in these matters. (Romans 12:8; 2 Corinthians 2:7; Colossians 4:8; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)
 - + Be mostly concerned with what God thinks about the matter.
 - Don'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., be more concerned for the other's well-being and God's will rather than your own comfort level.
 - + At the same time, do avoid trying to fix the other person's problem. Indicate your willingness to help, not to solve.
- Pray 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?