

How to Be a Caring and Helpful 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)

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

In the Bible, the Pastoral Care Ministry of the church is called shepherding < Ποίμαινε (*Poimaine*), “take care of” (John 21:16). This Greek verb is a command, an imperative, and it is in the present tense, meaning it is to be continuous action. See also 1 Peter 5:2, another imperative: ποιμάνατε (*poimanate*), shepherd. Significantly, it is in the aorist (past) tense, active voice, meaning already done and immediately.

- “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

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])

- Pastors, elders, and deacons are authorized caregivers in a church.
- However, all Christians are to show love, caring, to all people: fellow church members and others in the community.
- We are to care for not only those in the church but all others as well, beginning with people who have special needs but also all others as opportunities arise.

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

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])

- The caregiving ministry in a church is also a way to fulfill our Lord's great commission to us to accomplish his will to include in his kingdom those "from every nation, tribe, people and language." (Revelation 7:9)
- As the church, the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27) uniquely and lovingly responds to human needs, offering hurting people what the world cannot, the Holy Spirit draws people to and strengthens them in Christ Jesus.

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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])

- The resources in this program can be used for elders, deacons—even a refresher for pastors—and also as guidelines for other Christians in the church.
- In well over half a century as a pastor and seminary professor, I've found the following to be helpful ways to care for people God loves, whom he has called us to care for as well.

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.

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

Pastoral care involves four main functions.

1. **Healing**
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Pastoral Care: **Healing**

- a. When you observe a problem, proactively ask, “How are you doing?” If the person says, “Fine,” ask a follow-up question with caring eye contact, such as, “Really?” or “Are you sure?”
- b. If the person is willing to share a problem, listen carefully. Few people listen well or for long. If more time is needed ask if he or she would like you to visit or meet somewhere for a cup of coffee or tea or have lunch together. Show up: called a ministry of presence; just your being there nonverbally communicates much, including valuing the other’s well-being and willingness to help.

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Pastoral Care: **Healing**

- b. 1) Listen very carefully, actively listen. For example, periodically reflect back in your own words what you hear the other person saying. (See more below on listening carefully.)
- 2) Offer heartfelt empathy. “What you are going through is really tough.”

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Pastoral Care: **Healing**

- b. 3) Avoid trying to “fix” his or her problem. Don’t tell the other person what to do. Rather, explore options. After listening very carefully, ask, “Have you considered....” Indicate your willingness to help, not to solve, which we really cannot do for others; they have to do such communicating. They know the multitude of related details, and we cannot take on their responsibility.

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Pastoral Care: **Healing**

- c. Sometimes the needed healing involves ruptured relationships.
 - 1) When we are informed by someone in such a difficulty, the preceding will be helpful.
 - 2) In our caring conversation, we may also need to help by admonishing while “speaking the truth in love.” (Ephesians 4:15; Colossians 3:16; 4:8; Romans 12:8 [The Greek word παρακαλέω {*parakaleō*}, often translated exhort, also means admonish.]; 2 Corinthians 2:7; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). We must do such admonishing with gentleness and humility. (Galatians 6:1)

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Pastoral Care: **Healing**

- 2) a) In our desire to love people, we must avoid affirming—which is part of enabling—behavior that is harmful to relationships, especially when sin is involved. (Lev. 19:17b; Galatians 6:1-2)
- b) When such admonition is necessary, it is helpful to kindly and gently raise questions, such as, “You said...[or did].... How do you reconcile that with God’s Word that tells us not to do that?”

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Pastoral Care: **Healing**

2) c) When such admonition is necessary, it's also helpful to emphasize that we all are sinful and need to repent, ask forgiveness from God and any others involved, and that we live, survive, and thrive by grace through our faith in Christ Jesus.

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Pastoral Care: **Healing**

- 2)d) Be mostly concerned with what God thinks about the matter rather than what sinful human beings—even loved ones—think.
- Don't make the mistake many do and avoid talking about difficult matters, due to the failure to discern points where human psychology and a desire to be liked conflict with God's Word; i.e., be more concerned about God's will and for the others' well-being rather than your own comfort level. We're called to proclaim His Word.

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Pastoral Care: **Healing**

- 2) e) Ask if he or she has asked God for help in this matter?
 - 1- [If this person is at fault], ask,
 - a- “Have you repented and asked God to forgive you?”
 - b- “Have you apologized to the other person?”
 - c- “Do you need to make any restitution?”

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- 2) e) Ask if he or she has asked God for help in this matter?
- 2- [If the other person is at fault], ask,
 - a- “Have you talked with him [or her] about what occurred and how you feel about it?”
 - b- “Do you know how to have such a conversation with this person and feel comfortable doing so?”
(See, e.g., Matthew 18:15-17)

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Pastoral Care: **Healing**

- 2) e) Ask if he or she has asked God for help in this matter?
- 2- [If the other person is at fault], ask,
 - c- Mention that in order to please God and increase the likelihood of a good outcome, we need to have such conversations when these matters arise. In fact, we won't be able to resolve the issue or feel good about it until we do.

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Pastoral Care: **Healing**

2) e) For more information on offering admonition and the related subjects in this section, see these documents and other resources within them:

- [Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology—With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions](#)
- [Parenting: God’s Call to Parenting and Grandparenting](#)
- [Should Christians Never Judge?](#)
- [What Is God’s Will Concerning Homosexuality? Help for Church Leaders and Others to Speak the Truth in Love](#) (First and Second Editions)

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Pastoral Care: **Healing**

- f. When the time seems right (silently ask God) in your visit, likely toward the end of your conversation, ask your friend, “Would like to pray?” Or, “May I offer prayer?” Or, “This is such a difficult situation, let’s ask God for his help.” Most people will be glad to be asked. The greatest help you have to offer is helping people connect with God.
 - 1) You can ask what he or she would like you to mention specifically in the prayer.

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Pastoral Care: **Healing**

- f. 2) Use first person plural, “we,” not singular, “I,” so the other person feels he or she is praying too.
- 3) Offer a brief prayer, including any specific requests.
- 4) Several church denominations include beautiful and meaningful prayers for such occasions in their liturgies. Insert any specific requests as you read the prayer. Read carefully, sensitively, and prayerfully.
- 5) Many people appreciate a heartfelt extemporaneous prayer.

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Pastoral Care: **Healing**

For example, an extemporaneous prayer can include, “Dear God, we thank you for revealing that you immanent—always with us —that you already know about this exceedingly difficult situation [or huge challenge], and that you are transcendent: there is nothing you cannot do. Thank you for being all-knowing; that you can see all the possibilities and what will occur with each one. Please help us. Please give [Name] your wisdom, guidance, and direction as to the next steps to resolve this matter. In the meantime, please give her [him] the peace that passes all understanding and comes only in Christ Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen”

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Pastoral Care: **Healing**

g. Before leaving, say “You know, communicating with God is two-way. We’ve just brought some of our concerns to him. He has also spoken to us in his Word recorded in the Bible. May I read a helpful passage (or two) before I leave?”

1) If yes, read carefully with emphasis such passages as

- Psalm 46:1
- Matthew 28:20
- Philippians 4:4-7

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Pastoral Care: **Healing**

- g. 2) To see more Biblical and other resources for calling upon those who need healing, see [Worship: A Course on Worship in the Christian Church](#), especially Lesson Ten but also *passim*.

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Pastoral Care: **Healing**

- h. Communication is both verbal and nonverbal. The foregoing is largely verbal, except for warm eye contact and a loving tone of voice. Communicate also as appropriate by touch (e.g., hug or one hand on shoulder, showing love and caring) and sincerely offer to visit again. Offer to continue to pray for him or her in the meantime.
- i. Follow up by phone call, text, or another agreed upon method to ask how he or she is doing.

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Pastoral Care: **Sustaining**

- a. Again, listen carefully to your friend's complaints. Engage in conversation about the matters raised by your friend.
- b. Offer to share pastorally sensitive resources, e.g., sermons related to his or her situation.

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Pastoral Care: **Sustaining**

- c. Share Scripture from your heart and the written Word, especially texts related to your friend's struggle, e.g., worry, guilt, loneliness, doubt, illness, or broken relationship. For suggested passages pertaining to these struggles, see [Worship: A Course on Christian Worship](#).

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Pastoral Care: **Guiding**

- a. Discern spiritual direction, choosing the Biblical path.
- b. Offer gentle persuasion, compassionate urging to do something for the Lord's sake and for the friend's good.
- c. Offer admonition when wrong has been done, especially sin.
(2 Timothy 3:16, Ephesians 4:15)
 - Compassionate questions from one who confesses to also be a repentant sinner who is engaged in lifelong learning are helpful ways to offer such corrective feedback.

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Pastoral Care: **Reconciling**

- a. Build bridges and facilitate the healing of broken relationships
 - + in marriage
 - + in families
 - + in friendships
 - + in church
 - + with God
- b. “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation....”
(2 Corinthians 5:18)
- c. Review the discussion in section #1. Healing.

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

**HOW CAN PASTORS HELP BELIEVERS IN
AND FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST JESUS TO BE
CARING CHRISTIAN FRIENDS?**

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

Delegation of Ministry

1. Ministry properly done is more than the pastor can do by him or herself.
2. Ministry throughout the Bible has been delegated by leaders.
3. One important way the pastor provides care for Christ's sheep is by helping other believers identify and use the gifts the Holy Spirit has given them with which He will bless the Lord's people in the ways He has called and gifted them to do.

Delegation in the Bible

1. Delegation in the Old Testament
 - Exodus 18:13-26
2. Delegation in the New Testament
 - Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11;28; Ephesians 4:11
 - Acts 6:1-4
 - Galatians 6:2
 - 2 Timothy 2:2

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

4. All members of the church have caring needs.
5. A pastor can meet with members of the church when a member has an especially difficult problem, but
6. pastors cannot meet to care for every member's needs that are common, or even with some difficult but chronic challenges.

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

7. Such caring can be done by others in the church:
 - a. Elders and deacons where applicable to their calling.
 - b. Lay ministers, who have gifts from the Holy Spirit that are recognized by the pastor(s) and other church leaders, and especially those who have had special training to develop and use those gifts.
 - c. Christian friends: often their help is enough without needing the pastor.

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 - c. Christian friends: often their help is enough without needing the pastor.

Resources for understanding the teaching in God's Word on these subjects, e.g., gifts of the Spirit and calling, include the following:

- [Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology—With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions](#)
- [Leadership and Administration in the Church: Balancing Task Accomplishment and Caring](#)
- [Mentoring in Ministry](#)

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

What Does He or She Do?

1. View this ministry as ongoing and long-term.
2. Visit regularly with the friend or someone else in need.
 - a. Ask that person how often he/she would like to visit and where, e.g., in the friend's home? In a restaurant? Elsewhere?
 - b. Work on a project together (e.g., knitting, repairing a car, playing ping pong) facilitates helpful, caring conversations.
 - c. Talk about subjects the friend wants to discuss. Let him or her initiate the subjects.
 - d. 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?

3. Listen very carefully. (See also above for more on listening.)
 - a. Few people listen well or for long. 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."
 - b. Attentive listening with a willingness to spend considerable time doing so—and without looking at our watch—communicates caring. The other person feels valued and loved.
 - c. 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?

3. d. 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.

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

What Does He or She Do?

3. d. Listen a lot and caringly, intently, with genuine interest.
 - 1) Consider nonverbal communication (e.g., look for frowns, tears, sighs)
 - 2) Take into account what is not said.
 - 3) Look for indications of stress and distress.

4. If you are talking with a person who has just lost a spouse or other dearly loved one, offer suggestions from the 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>

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

How Is Such a Ministry Developed?

What Needs to Be Done

1. Provide awareness of the need for help in caring for church members, other attendees, friends, and loved ones who are not (yet but who may become) part of the church.
2. Talk with other leaders and mature Christians about who has such ministry potential.

How to Do What Needs to Be Done

1. Sermons, Newsletter articles.
2. Offer classes on this subject.
3. Encourage people who are doing such caring for others well to help others to do so.
4. Start a small support group. Include short presentations by members who have done such caring well. Invite others who have interest.
5. Personally contact specific people who are recognized as having specific gifts.

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

How Is Such a Ministry Developed?

What Needs to Be Done

3. Ask the congregation to pray that the Lord calls people to identify the gifts the Spirit has given them. Provide training to most effectively use the Spirit's gifts.
4. In particular provide encouragement, resources, and other support for the caring Christian friends, for those who would like to do so, and for those who need their care.

How to Do What Needs to Be Done

1. Sermons, Newsletter articles.
2. Offer classes on this subject.
3. Encourage people who are doing such caring for others well to help others do so.
4. Start a small support group. Include short presentations by members who have done and/or are doing such caring well.
5. Personally contact specific people who are recognized as having specific gifts.

How to Be a Caring Christian Friend

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION: How will you facilitate the development of such a ministry among the people in your congregation?