

Are you considering the ministry of Shepherding?

Words are vehicles for meaning. Some words are a great vehicle for communicating meaning accurately, while others have been loaded down with baggage. Words such as "bishop, overseer, and pastor" have a lot of baggage to them. Perhaps the same could be said of the word "elder." Some think of elders as authoritarian figures in the organization that do the deciding, issue decrees, and grant permission. Others think of them as some sort of church board that supervises the staff and creates policies. Others think of a power structure, where elders are at the top of the pyramid, deacons are below them, and the members are below them. Still there are those who think of elders as glorified deacons. Most of these concepts are shaped by worldly concepts of authority, and corporate models for doing business. Without deeper biblical and theological reflection, these are the sorts of "default" modes that you can fall into. The concern can quickly become focused more on facilities, money, and programs rather than on discipleship and spiritual growth.

Perhaps the word, "shepherd" is a better word because of the imagery it conjures. It may make you think of Jesus as the good shepherd. He is the model shepherd and the chief shepherd. The image of the shepherd is one of humility. It is one of being out front in leadership rather than giving orders from the back. It is an image of selfless sacrifice. It is a vivid picture of what shepherding involves.

Jesus reminds us that the wise builder counts the cost before he starts to build. This is a wise principle in considering any kind of ministry, especially the ministry of shepherding. In considering being a church leader, many think of what needs to happen "in the church" at large. This outward focus can be very utilitarian and pragmatic which can often be devoid of a good theological foundation. One needs to start with an inward focus. Any kind of effective Christian leadership has to begin there. Perhaps this is why the first Christian leaders said that their priority was "prayer and ministry of the word." Airline stewards always tell you that if there is a sudden drop in oxygen, put the mask on yourself first before helping anyone else.

I would like to spend some time in prayer and reflection with you. It is not by human power, wisdom, or anything like that, but by the Spirit of God. The Spirit is like the wind. As much as you can try, you cannot capture it in a box, or in a doctrinal formula, or control it. We don't grab and take the Spirit, our Lord grants the Spirit. We are not the one in control. Like Elijah in the cave, sometimes you have to wait in prayer and silence to discern how the Spirit is leading you. It doesn't always come in the frantic activity of life. It often comes in the quietness and stillness of the moment when God might grant crystal clarity. So, there is not a "formula" for spiritual discernment. That is why prayer and ministry of the word were so important to the lives of the first church leaders. This creates the environment by which God will lead us. God doesn't usually shout or force, he leads. For those that find security in being in control, for those who are impatient and want to jump up and start doing things, for those who do not really believe that God will "do" anything today, extended times of prayer, reflection, fellowship, and devotion may seem like a waste of time. Yet it is a necessary thing for renovation of the heart. This is how you put on the "oxygen mask" first so you can help others as a shepherd. This is some of what it means to be filled with the Spirit, with the breath of God that gives new life.

As the preacher, I would like to come alongside you and your wife in the process of discernment. There is a tool on the back of this letter...

Spend time in prayer and reflection over these questions, then talk about them with your wife.

1. In what way do you believe that you are called to be a Shepherd?
2. In what ways do confessional or accountability relationships figure into your faith? In what ways would this figure into your ministry as a shepherd?
3. Peter says to "Shepherd the flock of God among you." What does this phrase suggest to you about the nature of shepherding ministry?
4. Do you believe Christianity is about doing or being? How does this affect the way you see the ministry of shepherding? How does your inner life affect your ministry and in what way(s) is your inner life maintained?
5. As a shepherd, how do you envision the nature of your relationship with Christ? With the flock? With other ministry leaders? With the preacher? With the world at large?
6. What role(s) does your wife play in your ministry? What is the nature of the relationship between you and your wife in ministry? How do you support and complement each other in spirituality, ministry, and personal growth? How do you envision her role in your ministry as a shepherd?
7. What do you see as the key, center, or foundation of your shepherding ministry? What is that thing that is so central, that if it were not at the center, would stilt, deform, or perhaps even ruin your ministry? (besides scripture, that is a given)
8. What do you do, or are willing to do, or invest in, to grow in knowledge, skill, ability, etc. in your ministry?
9. What is your greatest fear in ministry? Your greatest joy?
10. What really re-energizes you?
11. In looking over the personal qualities and qualifications needed for shepherding (1 Tim 3; Tit 1 - you can look at the attached sheet for a summary), which do you see as the strongest in yourself? Which do you see as the weakest? How would this contribute toward your ministry?
12. How do you envision your ministry as a shepherd taking shape?

At some point in the next couple of weeks, I would like to come and have you share your reflections with me on these and to pray together with you. I would recommend that you spend time with your wife reading John 13; 1 Pet 5; Eph 4.

Brotherly,
Your Preacher

Summary of Qualifications:

This grouping can serve as a guide for both self-examination and evaluation of those that aspire to the ministry of shepherding:

1. Has the heart of a shepherd	Aspires to the overseership
2. Has good Christian Character	Above Reproach Good reputation with outsiders Not fond of dishonest gain Loves what is good Husband one wife (one woman man)
3. Can communicate well	Able to teach Uncontentious (not quarrelsome) Exhort in Sound Doctrine & refute those who contradict
4. Displays Christians maturity	Not a new convert Holds fast to the faithful word
5. Loves others	Hospitable Not Pugnacious (not a bully)
6. Is Self-Disciplined	Not quick tempered Self Controlled (disciplined) Prudent (excercises restraint)
7. Is a Proven Leader	Manages own household well Keep children under control Faithful children
8. Dedicated to God	Devout (pious, holy) Holds fast to the faithful word Free from the love of money
9. Displays wisdom	Temperate (clear-headed) Prudent (sensible, excercise restraint) Respectable (modest)
10. Displays both humility and strength	Not self-willed (arrogant) Able to refute those who contradict