The Minister as Shepherd

The Minister as Shepherd by Charles Jefferson is an important reminder to pastors that their work is more than just preaching. They are to be shepherds who spend time with their sheep, knowing each one personally like the Good Shepherd Himself did. The book maybe 100 years old but the lessons found within it are both challenging and timeless.

Introduction (Warren Wiersbe)

Let the preacher be a pastor and the flock will strengthen itself and increase.

The growing isolation and loneliness of modern society presents a great opportunity for the pastor who has a shepherd’s heart.

The Shepherd Idea in Scripture and History

Of all the titles which have been chosen from the envoys of the Son of God, that of “shepherd” is the most popular, the most beautiful and the most ample.

One of the secrets of the fascination of “shepherd” as a title is that the word carries us straight to Christ Himself. It associates us at once with Him.

The generation of Christians moulded by the apostles was trained to think of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, and the church leaders instructed by Peter and Paul went forth as shepherds to feed and tend Christ’s sheep.

To glorify Him we must do a shepherd’s work, and to enjoy Him forever we must have the shepherd’s heart.

No man can truly be the pastor of more than a few hundred people.

The finest test of the consecration of a minister of Christ is not in his public performances but in what he does when the world is not looking.

The Shepherd’s Work

Seven aspects to the work of a shepherd or pastor:

1) A watchman: One who searches for foes on the horizon – the wolves of false ideas, destructive interpretations, demoralizing teaching.

2) A guard: One who builds barriers against wolves.

3) A guide: One who goes in advance of people – who leads them in thought, points out things to be accomplished and in the manner they best be done.

4) A physician: One who applies the remedies provided by the Almighty to the diseases of souls.

5) A saviour: One who saves sheep that are lost – goes after straying sheep, seeks the lost outside the fold.
6) A feeder: One who does the pastoral work of warning, protecting, guiding, healing, rescuing, nourishing primarily in a sermon.

7) A lover: One who loves the sheep, knows them by name, spends life with them, and is willing to lay down their life for them.

Jesus says “I am the good shepherd” – “I watch, I guard, I heal, I rescue, I feed, I loved from the beginning and I love to the end. Follow Me!”

The Shepherd’s Opportunity

The pastor cannot do his work in the old way. After all there is ordinarily no hour in the day in which a pastor can meet the entire household, and members of each congregation are scattered over wide areas.

The pastoral work in a rich community is far more difficult than in a community that is poor. It was easier for Christ to help a poor man than a rich man and that has been the experience of all His ministers.

One of the problems within the church is the relation of minister to the church as a platform speaker to an audience.

Instead, the pastor must live with the people, think with their minds, feel with their hearts, see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and suffer with their spirits. Like a shepherd, he must have an individualising eye. He sees the solitary sheep. He cares for the personal need. The good shepherd always says “I know my own, and my own know me.” He calls his own sheep by name.

Another problem is that ministers do not stay with their churches as they used to stay.

But if he is a shepherd, if he knows his sheep by name, and if his sheep know his voice, he cannot pass from one fold to another without a great loneliness and heaviness of spirit and without deep wounds in the hearts of those he leaves behind him.

There is enormous pastoral work to do today, and the shepherds are few.

Shepherding work – knowing every sheep by name, giving every sheep a chance to know the shepherd – this is the direction in which an awakened church is bound to move.

The Shepherd’s Temptations

There are two particular temptations that pastors need to be aware of:

Love of things (or covetousness): an excessive desire for anything, which gratifies one’s own cravings. It is the disposition for having and for getting.

Minister stipend includes money, gratitude, praise, applause, and admiration. There is a temptation to make himself the centre of the church.

A man who thinks too much about himself has not sufficient time to give thought to others. He is a man whose heart is not in his work. He does it solely for what he expects to get out of it.

Love of power (or ambition): the love of prominence, the craving of distinction, desire for exalted rank.

It is a good thing for a minister to be defeated now and then, in order to find out that he is not invincible and that there are other people in the world besides himself.

There is a danger lurking in titles.

The Shepherd’s Reward
Ministers of Christ are to be richly rewarded for their labours.

The first reward: If love is the best thing in the world, then the faithful pastor gets more of the earth’s richest treasure than any other man. There is nothing more beautiful on this earth, than the love of a church for a faithful pastor.

The second reward: the gratification of helping people, and the peace of mind which comes at the end of work by which a heart has been soothed and brightened; the pleasure of taking men by the hand and lifting them out of the sloughs of despond, and sometimes out of the pit of despair.

The third reward: an increase of pulpit power. No man can study all the time. In pastoral work a minister is at work on his sermon! Sermon preparation requires two stages – work on the preacher and work on the message. There is no preparation of the preacher comparable with that which he gets in mingling with people. Unless the church is too large, a minister can be good both as pastor and preacher. The better he is as a pastor, the more effective he will be, other things being equal, as a preacher.

*What does pastoral work do for the preacher?*

- It supplies the minister with material for his sermons: “It is in his parish that the preacher gets his most telling illustrations.”
- It is in pastoral work that the minister comes to know human nature: “It is not enough to know what the world needs, one must know what it wants.”
- It improves the form of the sermon: “The preacher who is willing to let his people talk to him through the week will know better how to talk to them on Sunday.”
- It will give originality to his sermon: “The man who knows what is going on in his church, will have a vitality and freshness in his speech which will compel people to listen.”
- It enables the pastor to know the position of the hearers: “To be sure that the hearer gets a grip on the truth, it is necessary for the preacher to know the hearer’s exact position.”

The fourth reward: an increase in spiritual stature. The reward of the shepherd is that he becomes increasingly like the Good Shepherd – he is transformed into the same image from glory to glory even as from the Lord the Spirit.

Many of us cannot be brilliant – we could have been had God so ordered – but we can every one be faithful.

The shepherd’s work is never done.