

# LESSON ESSENTIALS

## SPIRITUAL GIFTS

### LESSON 2: THE SHEPHERDING GIFTS

For some people, the shepherding gifts may seem intimidating to use, yet they are crucial to the success and health of the body of Christ. In fact, 1 Corinthians 12 encourages us to pursue some of these shepherding gifts. A brief description of the function of the shepherding gifts may assist us in our pursuit and desire of those gifts.

In John 21, Jesus questions Peter about his love for His Lord. As a sign of that love, Peter was commanded by Jesus to tend to, and to feed, His sheep. That was a call to exercise the Shepherding Gifts. But what are those gifts, and who exactly is expected to use them?

When the people gathered to hear Jesus preach, He saw them like “sheep without a shepherd” and it caused him to have compassion on them. So He taught them, He healed them, and He offered them the provision for their greatest need – salvation.

From one-on-one mentoring relationships to small groups and Bible studies, from youth ministry to elders and deacons, there are many types of leaders in the church.

The notion of shepherding gifts referring to people in church leadership would sound foreign to one who has not read the Bible. Certainly outside of the context of spiritual gifts, shepherding only refers to the care of literal sheep. The analogy of a leader of the people being like a shepherd is introduced in the Old Testament (The 23rd Psalm, Zechariah 11 and 13, and Ezekiel 34, for example). However, Jesus gives clarity to the new meaning of the term when He calls Himself the Good Shepherd (John 10) and when He compares His people to sheep (See Mark 6:34, for example). When the people gathered to hear Jesus preach, He saw them like “sheep without a shepherd” and it caused him to have compassion on them. So He taught them, He healed them, and He offered them the provision for their greatest need – salvation. In doing this, He acknowledged that the people need to be led, protected, provided for, and taught.

With such a weighty job description, many people would therefore associate the term “shepherding gifts” with the senior pastor at their church. Pastors take on Christ-like leadership over their congregations, leading them as a shepherd leads his sheep. However, there is more than one way to exercise shepherding gifts, and being the senior pastor is not the only way.

The shepherding gifts can be broken into several categories that help us to understand some of the ways that we might exercise these gifts. These categories are: Administration, Leadership, Pastoring, and Teaching.

**Administration** – A good administrator can effortlessly keep the ‘sheep’ in order, helping them to know the pertinent details of church life, and ensuring that all the staff and volunteers are provided with what they need to accomplish their God-given tasks. In many ways, the administration gift works like a scout watching over the details of the circumstances that may harm or help the flock. Also, this gift equips the others by showing them the existing needs and ensuring that all the details are in place so that no additional problems arise. Obviously, this gift could be found in a church secretary or in an assistant to church staff. But it can also be a volunteer who takes minutes at meetings, or who arranges the sign-up lists and schedules for meetings or programs.

**Leadership** – From one-on-one mentoring relationships to small groups and Bible studies, from youth ministry to elders and deacons, there are many types of leaders in the church. Indeed, outside of a church context, many parents are also blessed to have

leadership gifts that equip them to lead their families. Giving clear direction and oversight, and ensuring none of the 'sheep' go astray are what leadership looks like, too. Without firm leadership and a clear example to follow, the people do wander towards whoever else is trying to lead them away from the gospel and the truth of God's Word.

Pastoring – Part of the shepherd's job is to care for the sick and wounded sheep, and to help them to be strong enough to follow the leader again. Truly, a pastor in a church cares for the needs of his members. Whether he visits them in hospital, prays for them, talks to and counsels them, or gently corrects them when they stray, the pastor tends to the wounded. Hopefully it is clear, though, that these skills could be executed by any lay person in the church, not only the paid-position or elder appointed senior pastor. Without pastoring among a body of believers, the members grow weaker, poorer, and more confused leading to a wounded and broken body. Pastoring is such an important gift for the church to utilize!

Teaching – Sheep need to be fed. They need good, healthy, consistent nourishment. This is the teaching element of the shepherding gifts. Without the meat and milk of the Word being rightly taught and explained, God's people will die. A good teacher is critical to the health and vitality of the flock. Again, this need not be the paid pastor who teaches. A women's ministry speaker, a youth worker, a Sunday School teacher, or a parent are all examples of roles in the church or home that require the teaching gift. 2 Peter 2:1-2 warns of false teachers who would sneak in heretical teaching and leading many astray. This is why Biblical knowledge and understanding in both the teacher and the congregation is a necessity. The 'flock' needs to be taught properly so that they will not be led astray by false teachers.

It is a great blessing to the church to have men and women with the spiritual gift of shepherding. It can be a great burden to that person to have those gifts as they do come with great responsibility. However, we need to always remember – with all of the gifts, but with these shepherding gifts especially, perhaps – that these are the Holy Spirit's gifts, not ours. And the Great Shepherd Himself will, indeed, grant to us the wisdom, the compassion, the knowledge, and the humility that we need to rightly shepherd the flocks He gives us.

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## IN REVIEW

- The Shepherding Gifts are Administration, Leadership, Pastoring, and Teaching.
- These gifts are not only found in paid-staff positions at church. Many lay people also exercise these gifts to the benefit of their families, neighbourhoods, and mentoring relationships.
- There are false teachers, manipulative pastors, and poor leaders that would seek to infiltrate the church and undermine the work of the Lord. We must be diligent to pray for discernment and for understanding of the Word so that the falsehood is easily recognized and avoided.

## HAVE YOUR SAY

- Do you think that you have Shepherding Gifts? Have other affirmed those gifts in you? How is it manifesting in your life? Take time to pray for the wisdom to know how to exercise the shepherding gifts that you've been given in a way that fits with the Lord's purposes for you.
  
- Think of the people in your life who have ministered to you by using their shepherding gifts. Take time to thank them and to let them know how the Lord has blessed you through their obedient service.

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