

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership Study Guide

PASTORAL BASICS

LESSON 1: THE ROLE OF A PASTOR

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module titled Pastoral Basics. This module will be helpful for untrained leaders who are serving as pastors, for churches who are looking for a pastor, and for those pursuing a pastoral role. It will outline the many duties a pastor may have in a local church, and what church members should expect from their pastor. Some specific challenges are also included, such as ministry to different age groups as well as considerations for church growth.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.



PASTORAL BASICS

LESSON 1: THE ROLE OF A PASTOR

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

This lesson examines what it means to be a pastor, and what the Bible says about pastoral ministry.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

Different assemblies of Christians have different leadership structures. Priests, elders, pastors, and ministers all function as overseers and take responsibility for certain duties within an assembly. Some churches empower their leaders with incredible authority, trusting what they do and say. Others believe that every believer is equal in their spiritual authority, and that titles and formalized leadership are not necessary. For the purposes of this lesson, we will take the middle route as most Christians do; the role of church leadership comes with specific responsibilities. We will call that leadership role 'pastor' and will also use the masculine pronoun to refer to pastors. However, we recognize there are leadership roles and positions of pastoring for women as well, to greater or lesser degrees depending on the culture and church denomination.

GETTING STARTED

1. Have you had an excellent pastor in your life? What did you specifically appreciate about their ministry?

2. What are some qualities that make a good pastor?



STUDY

❖ **BIBLICAL ROOTS OF THE PASTOR:** We live in a world where authority is often rejected in favour of choosing our own path. And yet, throughout the Bible God places people in authority in order to help, guide and teach people. These leaders were prophets, priests, judges and kings until the time of Jesus. Though we now have God’s Word and the Holy Spirit to guide us, we still need to belong to a community of believers, and submit to spiritual authority placed there by God. We have various titles for those in authority in our churches today, but they are all pastors – overseers of God’s people.

- **Jesus the Great Shepherd:** Jesus is our ultimate authority. Without His guidance and teaching we will never follow God’s ways, and we will become lost and deceived.
- Read Matthew 9:36, Luke 12:32, John 10:11-18. How did Jesus view the people? What did He call Himself?

- **Shepherding the Flock of God:** Jesus maintains His ultimate authority, but gives the work of shepherding a group of believers to specific people. The metaphor of shepherding provides our understanding of leadership within the Church. How is the metaphor of sheep and shepherds used in the following verses? Who are the shepherds? Who are the sheep?

John 21:17	
1 Peter 5:1-4	
Acts 20:28-29	

❖ **THE PASTOR AS SHEPHERD:** How exactly are pastors of churches like shepherds? And how does this metaphor describe the way a pastor structures his ministry, or plans out his work week? In order to answer these questions we will explore this metaphor further.

In Bible times, raising sheep was common. Shepherds held a role of responsibility: great numbers of sheep had to be moved from one place to another in order to be fed, they needed



protection from predators, as well as constant care and vigilant guarding so they would not become lost. The shepherd was accountable to the owner of the sheep. Sheep prospered under the care of a good shepherd as they have no natural defensive ability when left alone. They can easily be destroyed by wild animals.

A pastor's responsibility for his flock (or congregation) is like that of a shepherd:

- **Feed:** Just as sheep need to be fed, Christians need spiritual food. To feed your flock, you must teach them the Word of God. This often takes the form of sermons given during Sunday worship, but also group Bible studies, or teaching individuals. A pastor should teach what the congregation needs, not just what they want to hear.
 - **Teach your sheep:** We are to teach people what the Bible says, and help them understand what it means. While church members should be expected to read the Word on their own, they benefit from a pastor teaching and explaining it to them. Read the verses below to see how God’s Word is compared to food.

Matthew 4:4	
1 Peter 2:2	

What does this tell you about the necessity of teaching God’s Word?

- **Lead:** Just as sheep need to be led to places where they can be fed and led away from places of danger, Christians need a shepherd to lead them in the right direction. Shepherds (pastors) must seek God’s will for the particular mission of their Church (the way it can spread the Gospel and serve the community). This vision may be designed by a number of elders or pastors working as a team.
 - **Lead your sheep:** A congregation without direction will scatter, fall away or look for leadership that may not be godly. A church that understands why it exists and what God expects of them can accomplish great things. A pastor should lead their congregation by passionately inspiring them to move in the right direction with unity.

Read [Jeremiah 23:1](#) and [Proverbs 29:18](#). What can happen to people if they are not led with vision?



- **Rescue:** As sheep have little sense of direction even when near to home, so members of a church community sometimes become lost. In addition, sheep without any shepherd are also lost. Another role of the pastor is to restore those who have left the congregation and/or who are living in sin. This may involve confronting sin, helping those with doubts to be strengthened in their faith, and spreading the Gospel through evangelism. A pastor cares for his own sheep, and also those who are still outside the flock.
 - **Restoring your sheep:** A lost sheep will only be safe when brought into a flock, under the care of a shepherd. As a lone sheep is easy prey for a predator, so lost people need to be led back to safety. A pastor does this by restoring people to relationship with God.
 - Read [Isaiah 53:6](#) and [James 5:19-20](#). What do these verses tell us about our tendency to wander, and the role of leaders in restoring the people?

- **Protect:** Sheep face many dangers: wolves, lions, even fast moving water or thorny bushes. Sheep have no defences. They cannot run, kick or bite with much effectiveness, and they huddle together when attacked. A shepherd who can protect them is their only means of survival. Christians need protection also. False teaching, error, blasphemy and worldly philosophy can all contaminate a congregation, but a good pastor will foresee these dangers and provide a safe place for his congregation. He will teach truth so that they will recognize falsehood when they see it.
 - **Defending your sheep:** Making your congregation aware of the enemy, praying for their protection, and teaching them to be equipped with spiritual armour are among the tasks of a pastor. Defend the truth, do not keep silent about error or sin that you see, and guard your sheep from deception ([Acts 20:28-30](#)).
 - What are some of the dangers that your people face? How can a pastor help protect them from these dangers?

- **Comfort:** The relationship between a shepherd and sheep is one of great affection. The sheep follow and trust the shepherd, who comes to the aid of his sheep and lovingly guides them. The very presence of the shepherd comforts the sheep in times of fear or darkness. Similarly, a pastor will often be needed to comfort his congregation, individually and collectively, during times of illness, persecution, death,



fear and war. The pastor must continually remind the church to trust in God, to come to Him for comfort in the midst of their fears.

- o **Comforting your sheep:** The pastor must remind the people of God's presence with them, and that they are not alone. How does a pastor receive comfort to give to others? What does 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 say?

➤ **Strengthen:** A wounded sheep would be cared for by the shepherd. He would carry a weak or feeble animal until it could stand on its own. A shepherd will not cast off a frail animal, but will provide what is needed. Similarly, pastors will find weak members of the church who need extra care. When a member of the church is sick, they should be visited and prayed for by the pastor or elder. Whenever they are afraid or doubting, the pastor ought to encourage them.

- o **Strengthening your sheep:** The pastor should teach his congregation to rely on God (not on him) for their strength. The role of the pastor is to identify weaknesses in the lives of the congregation, remind them how God can strengthen them, and equip them to seek God on their own.

Read Isaiah 40:28-31 and James 5:14-16. What should a person facing trials and weaknesses do? How can a pastor help them with this task?

➤ **Know:** A shepherd knows each sheep by name. As each passes beneath his rod at night when it returns to the fold (Leviticus 27:32), the shepherd counts and identifies those who belong to him. A shepherd would know the pedigree of each sheep, its health and habits. A pastor must also know his congregation. It may not be possible to have a close relationship with everyone who attends a large church, but this is where elders and other church servants can help. To know someone requires considerable time and effort. But just as a sheep follows the shepherd, each Christian will best follow and take discipline from a pastor who knows them well.

- o **Knowing your sheep:** A pastor demonstrates love for the members of his congregation by getting to know them, caring for them, visiting them personally, and being aware of problems in their lives. A pastor follows God's example by caring for and loving his congregation.
- o How does knowing the congregation help a pastor to lead them better?



❖ **The Boundaries of a Pastor:** The role of a pastor is a great one, but there are limitations to what is expected of you. Your role is to shepherd under Jesus and care for His flock. You do not own the sheep, because they have always and will always belong to God. Therefore, you are merely to be faithful in doing the work God has given you to the best of your ability.

- **Who you Shepherd:** If you have received a calling from a particular church or a gathering of Christians to serve as a pastor, your responsibility is to that particular group and the surrounding community. The mandate to pastors in Acts 20:28 specifies that pastors are to oversee, care for, and give careful attention to “all the flock”, which is all those who place themselves under your authority by attending or becoming members of your church.
- **Not alone as Shepherd:** There are many ways for people to serve God in the local church. The pastor is merely one position among many! A pastor should equip others to serve as well, so as to avoid doing the work and making decisions all alone. If the pastor is the only one with authority, his power could become easily corrupted. Read the verses below. What titles of church servants are listed? Why do you think there are different roles?

Ephesians 4:11	
1 Timothy 3:1-13	
1 Peter 5:1-2	

- **Limitations of the Shepherd:** While the responsibilities of the servants of the church are great, we must remember these things:
 - We cannot make anyone obey God, but we can give them an example to follow.
 - We cannot save anyone’s soul, but we can point them to the Saviour.
 - We cannot restore a lost person who stubbornly refuses to be rescued.
 - We cannot always remove the suffering of another, but we can have compassion.
 - We cannot make someone listen, but we can be faithful to speak the truth and teach God’s Word faithfully.



- Can you think of other pastoral responsibilities beyond those listed in this lesson?

- Of those you listed, which of those could be done by someone else to assist the pastor?

❖ **WHAT GOD NEEDS FROM YOU AS PASTOR:** God chastised the leaders of His people through the Old Testament prophets because they were not leading in truth and righteousness, but rather fighting for power and dishonest gain.

- Read the warnings given by these prophets in [Ezekiel 34:1-6](#) and [Jeremiah 23:1-4](#). What angered God? What were the pastors doing wrong?

These sins were taken seriously by God. If you take on the role of a pastor, God requires some things of you:

- **Remain close to the Great Shepherd:** In order to serve God's people, you must remain close to God. Your spiritual health and relationship to God is always your first priority. This requires you to spend time praying regularly for yourself, your family, your people, and your community. Be fed by God Himself so you can feed others. Sincerely obey God so others can follow you ([John 14:4](#), [1 John 2:27](#), [1 Corinthians 11:1](#)).
- **Lay down your life for the sheep:** Unlike the corrupt leaders of God's people in the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, we should not put our own interests and comforts above the important work of ministry. After our own relationship with God followed by that with our immediate family, the people of God are our next priority. While it is important to balance ministry with family and personal obligations, we must be sure that the people under our care are not neglected and that they have a faithful shepherd ([John 10:11](#), [John 15:13](#), [1 John 3:16](#)).

❖ **Conclusion:** Serving the people of God in the local church is like being a shepherd to sheep. Sheep can be difficult to lead, but without a shepherd they cannot function or be kept safe. If



you are called to be a pastor, remember what the most important aspects of your job are. If you are part of a local church, consider how you can help your pastor fulfill his job.

SUMMARY

- ❖ Serving the people of God in the local church is like being a shepherd to sheep.
- ❖ Just like shepherds, Pastors must feed, lead, rescue, protect, comfort, strengthen and know their followers.
- ❖ The pastoral role does have its boundaries. Because of this, pastors need people who will keep them accountable.
- ❖ We must remember that we cannot make anyone obey God, but we can give them a good example to follow. We cannot save anyone's soul, but we can point them to the Saviour.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What happens when a pastor puts his own plans or the programs of the church ahead of his people?

2. What does a pastor need from his people in order to do his job well?

3. What is God's calling on your life? Have you been called by God to shepherd His people? If not, how can you support and assist a pastor with their important work?