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# Introduction to Adolescent Pastoral Care

## Biblical Principles of Pastoral Care

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The verse in Scripture that gives us perhaps the most complete definition of pastoral care is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:14.

**a. To urge** (*Gr. parakaleo*)

The Greek meaning is literally to call (*kaleo*) alongside (*para*). In pastoral care we do not come from a position of superiority.

**b. To warn** (*Gr. noutheteo*)

The Greek meaning is literally to place (*theo*) in the mind (*nous*). Pastoral care of the adolescent involves presenting reasoned warnings of the consequences of certain wrong courses of actions.

**c. To encourage** (*Gr. paramutheomai*)

The Greek meaning is literally to instruct (*mueo*) alongside (*para*). Pastoral care involves wise, Biblical instruction.

**d. To take tender care of** (*Gr. antechomai*)

The Greek meaning is literally to hold (*echo*) opposite (*anti*). In pastoral care we stick closely to them, complementing their weaknesses with our strengths.

**e. To be patient** (*Gr. makrothumeo*)

The Greek meaning is literally long (*makro*) passion (*thumeo*). Adolescents need pastoral carers who will stick with them over time.

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<sup>14</sup> Brothers and sisters, we **urge** you to **warn** those who are lazy. **Encourage** those who are timid. **Take tender care** of those who are weak. **Be patient** with everyone.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:14

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## 1. Pastoral Care and the Ministry of Jesus

By studying the ministry of Jesus, we learn six principles about pastoral care:

### a. Acceptance of the sinner: Adulterous Woman (Jn 8:4-11)

Jesus made it clear that he had not come to condemn the world but to save it (John 3:17). If Jesus had no mandate to condemn the sinner, then what mandate do we have? Instead Jesus sought to release people from the shackles of guilt, not that they might go on sinning but that they might be made free to change.

### b. Admonishment of the sinful: Disciples (Mk 9:33b-37)

Jesus acceptance of the sinner did not mean that he condoned sin. On the contrary He was willing to confront it, and no more so than when He saw it among his own followers. Yet even in His admonition He is non-judgmental, offering acceptance, not condemnation.

### c. Awareness of the needy: Loaves and Fishes (Mk 8:1-8)

Amidst the busyness of “ministry” Jesus had the sensitivity to notice people’s needs and the faith to be part of the solution, even when the available resources seemed limited. In pastoral care there will be many times when we feel inadequate, yet we can take comfort in the fact that God can, through us, provide “food” for the needy whom we care for.

### d. Assurance for the anxious: Man with Leprosy (Lk 5:12,13)

Frequently in pastoral care, the individual’s greatest need is for hope: hope that we care enough to want to help, and hope that Jesus can bring healing to their situation. In this passage the man had faith that Jesus could heal him, but lacked hope that He would. Therefore Jesus first brings assurance to the man that He cares enough to help, before bringing healing from the leprosy.

### e. Attraction to the outcast: Zacchaeus (Luke 19:2-10)

The leader’s responsibility to provide pastoral care will see them devote time to the “difficult” individual - the outcast whom others might ignore or ostracise because of their behaviour. Yet it was these very people whom Jesus seemed most attracted to and the attention He gave them led to a sense of personal value and eventually change.

### f. Attentiveness to insignificant: Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46-52)

Amidst the noise of the crowd Jesus would frequently hear the cry of the needy. Those whom others would dismiss as being insignificant were important to Jesus and received His individual attention. He called to them, He listened to them, and He acted for them.

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“The counselor must be, above much else, a man of hope. He must be fully persuaded of the faithfulness of God in fulfilling His promises. Nothing less than this will give him the confident enthusiasm that is needed in speaking of hope (expectation) of change.”

- Jay Adams,

“The Christian

## Pastoral Care and Adolescence

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### 1. Developmental Issues

There are characteristics of teens that make pastoral care quite unique.

#### a. Physical Development

Young people not only have external pressures to cope with - they have significant internal changes occurring, triggered by hormonal activity which marks the onset of puberty. These hormonal changes affect them in many ways, not the least of which is a preoccupation with physical appearance and a heightened sensitivity to other people's comments.

#### b. Emotional Development

Adolescence is characterised by intense, changeable and confusing emotions. In providing pastoral care for the adolescent we must:

- i. Provide stability and objectivity to balance what might seem to us be over emotionalism. Our response will help them to achieve their own degree of stability and perspective.
- ii. Avoid over reacting to expressions of emotion. Remember that adolescents are still learning how to express emotions in an appropriate way, and we must beware of interpreting emotions as if they were being expressed by a mature adult.
- iii. Help them understand their emotions. Often the adolescent is as much puzzled by their emotional reaction as we are! We can help them by giving the opportunity to verbalise and analyse their feelings.

#### c. Social Development

There are two primary social "tasks" of adolescence:

- i. Identity: In providing pastoral care we need to remember that what we see is not always what we get! The adolescent's perception of self is incomplete and often inaccurate. The seemingly confident, self assured teenager may in fact be plagued by self doubt and insecurity. They will be extremely sensitive to any perceived criticism and may react by either withdrawing or lashing out. Effective pastoral care helps the adolescent understand who they are becoming, and provides positive feedback on which they can shape their emerging identity.
- ii. Independence: Adolescents are no longer children, yet they are not quite adults. They want to function as independent adults but they lack the life experience and confidence to fully do so. In pastoral care we help them to take responsibility for their own decisions and actions, yet we realise that this process will be slower than it would for a mature adult.

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"Before we can counsel a teenager, we must understand the psychology of adolescence. Otherwise counseling is less effective and sometimes even destructive."

- Dr G. Keith Olson  
*"Counseling Teenagers"*

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"There is an urgency about counseling with a teenager. His life patterns are crystallizing and he will soon be remarkably set for life. In many instances it is now or never. A counselor knows this, so he does not regret spending extra time with him, taking full advantage of this crucial period in his life."

- Dr Clyde Narramore,  
*"The Psychology of Counseling"*

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#### d. Cognitive Development

The adolescent is developing their ability to think abstractly and to imagine the future consequences of present actions (formal reasoning). This affects pastoral care to them as follows:

- i. Abstract thought: The real significance of terms such as love, loyalty, responsibility, and faith is beginning to dawn on them. What was once a black and white world is becoming increasingly grey and more questions are being posed than are being answered. They need us to patiently help them explore the implications of these abstract concepts.
- ii. Formal reasoning: Adolescents won't grasp the implications of their actions as easily and in the same way as a mature adult would. They will need help to analyse the outcomes of a certain course of action and to explore the impact of its consequences.

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“When adolescents are able to solve their problems with reasonable success and feel increasingly confident in their abilities to cope, periods of struggle gradually become less frequent and less intense. Only then will fulfilment begin to outweigh struggle.”  
 - Les Parrott, *“Helping the Struggling Adolescent”*

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#### e. Moral Development

The cognitive development of adolescents affects their moral development. Moral decisions become far more complex than in childhood, yet they lack an adult's breadth of knowledge and experience to make wise choices. Their natural egocentricity makes it more difficult for them to appreciate how their actions might affect others.

Therefore, in providing pastoral care we need to help them reflect on moral issues from the standpoint beyond their own. The law of “loving others as oneself”, while apparent in theory, will not always seem immediately relevant to their situation.

#### f. Faith Development

While faith development is in one sense, never-ending, the adolescent is perhaps undergoing a greater transition than at any other stage in life. Two characteristics that are particularly significant and unique are:

- i. Emotionalism: The need to have some “experience” of God is an important part of the process of faith development for the adolescent. This leads to a tendency to place a greater reliance upon feelings than is warranted. In offering pastoral care we need to help the adolescent understand what many adults have already learnt: namely that feelings are not always reliable indicators of the state of our relationship with God.
- ii. Separation: In order for the adolescent to develop their own faith it is necessary for those brought up in a Christian home to “separate” themselves from their Christian beliefs in order to re-assess them and decide if they want to take ownership of them on into adulthood. This separation constitutes anything from genuine questioning all the way through to open rebellion. At this stage of their development pastoral care is most effective when it gives them the freedom to ask the questions and to grapple with the answers. Answers cannot be imposed they can only be offered.

## **Pastoral Care and Youth Ministry**

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### **1. Characteristics of a Pastoral Care Programme**

Pastoral care is an important part of any youth ministry and it deserves attention similar to that which is given to other aspects of programming. Pastoral care should be:

#### **a. Systematic**

All young people should have equal access to pastoral care. They should have at least one other person “assigned” to them who takes responsibility for building a helping relationship. By “being there” for the young person, a youth ministry remains informed as to what is happening in their young people’ lives, any problems can be dealt with before they escalate.

#### **b. Shared**

While responsibility for pastoral care might be carefully assigned, a youth ministry should still intentionally cultivate an atmosphere of mutual care where all leaders are responsible for all young people and all young people take responsibility to care for each other. This does not happen by accident - it must be consistently taught and modelled.

#### **c. Suitable**

The success or otherwise of a pastoral care programme stands or falls on the quality of people involved in it. Adults assigned the responsibility of caring for young people should be suitable role models, who possess a genuine love for God and a love for teenagers. A pastoral care team should represent a range of divergent personality types who collectively can relate to a wide variety of young people.

#### **d. Specific**

While a pastoral care programme must operate routinely in supporting young people, it must also have the ability to respond to a range of specific pastoral care issues such as caring for the ill, integrating the newcomers, and following up the absentees. There needs to be clear guidelines as to who is responsible for addressing each of these issues and how. (A later session will offer some specific suggestions).

## 2. Models of Pastoral Care

There are a number of ways in which pastoral care may be provided. A youth ministry could usefully adopt any of the following models, integrating ideas from the others.

### a. Pastoral Care Team

A team of adults provides pastoral care of the young people, with each taking responsibility for a small group. These people may also be Bible study or home group leaders. The size of the “team” varies according to the size of the group, with one person taking responsibility for no more than about ten people.

### b. Peer Support

Young people provide the first line of pastoral care support for each other. They may form small care groups for mutual support and accountability.

### c. Buddy System

Older members of the youth ministry are assigned younger members to care for, follow up and encourage.

### d. Mentoring

An adult takes responsibility for the nurture of a young person, contacting them regularly and being there for them when needed.

### e. Family Groups

Parents take the primary responsibility for pastoral care, not only for their own teenager, but also for their teenager’s friends (whether these friend’s parents are involved in the youth ministry or not).

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“Good organisation means creating the set of conditions in which adults in the church feel a pastoral responsibility for teenagers who do not belong to their family; and where teenagers feel close enough to non-related adults that they can go to see them with their problems and questions.”

- John Allan, from *“The Church and Youth Ministry”*

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*Proceed to page 1 in the workbook and complete the questions*

