

INTRODUCTION TO ADOLESCENT PASTORAL CARE

What do we mean by “Pastoral Care”?

It is an agricultural term adopted from shepherding and used more commonly in Christian circles as being the responsibility of a “pastor” charged with the responsibility of “shepherding their flock”.

Yet it is frequently a term used somewhat glibly without perhaps much thought given to the breadth of activity it encompasses.



Complete the phrase below by coming up with as many verbs as possible to define the activities involved in “pastoral care”

To provide pastoral care is to:

Biblical Principles of Pastoral Care

1. A Biblical Definition of Pastoral Care

The verse in Scripture that gives us perhaps the most complete definition of pastoral care is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:14. In it are found five different words which constitute pastoral care:

¹⁴ *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

a. To urge (*Gr. parakaleo*)

The Greek meaning is literally to call (*kaleo*) alongside (*para*). In pastoral care we come alongside the adolescent. We do not call to them from a position of superiority or of having somehow “arrived”.

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 is more than mere emotional support. It 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 “hold ourselves opposite” to the adolescent or put another way, 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 are at a particularly difficult time of life. They need pastoral carers who will stick with them for the long haul.

¹² I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be.

¹³ No, dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven.

- Philippians 3:12,13

2. Pastoral Care and the Ministry of Jesus

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

a. Acceptance of the sinner

⁴ "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the very act of adultery. ⁵ The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?"

⁶ They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. ⁷ They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, stone her. But let those who have never sinned throw the first stones!" ⁸ Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

⁹ When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. ¹⁰ Then Jesus stood up again and said to her, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

¹¹ "No, Lord," she said.

And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

- John 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

Jesus asked them, "What were you discussing out on the road?" ³⁴ But they didn't answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest. ³⁵ He sat down and called the twelve disciples over to him. Then he said, "Anyone who wants to be the first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else."

³⁶ Then he put a little child among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes my Father who sent me."

- Mark 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.

"The one underlying characteristic of Jesus' ministry is that He was consistently in relationship with people. Whether He was confronting a prostitute by a well in the middle of a hot afternoon, or leading His closest followers in a time of prayer and special communion, it is clear that Jesus' ministry strategy was relational. He was not some aloof leader, dipping down in the jungle periodically like Tarzan to scream at and kick a few natives before he returned to his ruling roost in the tree tops."
- Duffy Robbins, "The Ministry of Nurture"

c. Awareness of the needy

¹ About this time another great crowd had gathered, and the people ran out of food again. Jesus called his disciples and told them, ² "I feel sorry for these people. They have been here with me for three days, and they have nothing left to eat. ³ And if I send them home without feeding them, they will faint along the road. For some of them have come a long distance."

⁴ "How are we supposed to find enough food for them here in the wilderness?" his disciples asked.

⁵ "How many loaves of bread do you have?" he asked.

"Seven," they replied. ⁶ So Jesus told all the people to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves, thanked God for them, broke them into pieces, and gave them to his disciples, who distributed the bread to the crowd. ⁷ A few small fish were found, too, so Jesus also blessed these and told the disciples to pass them out.

⁸ They ate until they were full, and when the scraps were picked up, there were seven large baskets of food left over!

- Mark 8:1-8

Here we see Jesus alert to the needs of those about him. Amidst the busyness of "ministry" He had the sensitivity to notice their need 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

¹² In one of the villages, Jesus met a man with an advanced case of leprosy. When the man saw Jesus, he fell to the ground, face down in the dust, begging to be healed. "Lord," he said, "if you want to, you can make me well again."

¹³ Jesus reached out and touched the man. "I want to," he said. "Be healed!" And instantly the leprosy disappeared.

- Luke 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.

"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
Counselor's Manual"

e. Attraction to the outcast

² There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was one of the most influential Jews in the Roman tax-collecting business, and he had become very rich. ³ He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowds. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree beside the road, so he could watch from there.

⁵ When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! For I must be a guest in your home today."

⁶ Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. ⁷ But the crowds were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled.

⁸ Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have overcharged people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!"

⁹ Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ And I, the Son of Man, have come to seek and save those like him who are lost."

- 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 the insignificant

⁴⁶ Later, as Jesus and his disciples left town, a great crowd was following. A blind beggar named Bartimaeus (son of Timaeus) was sitting beside the road as Jesus was going by. ⁴⁷ When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus from Nazareth was nearby, he began to shout out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁸ "Be quiet!" some of the people yelled at him.

But he only shouted louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁹ When Jesus heard him, he stopped and said, "Tell him to come here."

So they called the blind man. "Cheer up," they said. "Come on, he's calling you!" ⁵⁰ Bartimaeus threw aside his coat, jumped up, and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked.

"Teacher," the blind man said, "I want to see!"

⁵² And Jesus said to him, "Go your way. Your faith has healed you." And instantly the blind man could see! Then he followed Jesus down the road.

- Mark 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.

3. Pastoral Care and the Teachings of Jesus

a. Genuine Compassion

³⁶ He felt great pity for the crowds that came, because their problems were so great and they didn't know where to go for help. They were like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ He said to his disciples, "The harvest is so great, but the workers are so few. ³⁸ So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send out more workers for his fields."

- Matthew 9:35-38

The shepherd of God's people must have compassion for their people. They see them as more than faces, or numbers in a programme. They are people with real hopes and fears, who need genuine pastoral care.

b. Individual Concern

¹² "If a shepherd has one hundred sheep, and one wanders away and is lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others and go out into the hills to search for the lost one? ¹³ And if he finds it, he will surely rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn't wander away! ¹⁴ In the same way, it is not my heavenly Father's will that even one of these little ones should perish."

- Matthew 18:12-14

Genuine compassion must result in individual concern. Pastoral care must be comprehensive, but it can never be apportioned equally. Some will require more care than others, and at times we will sacrifice the interests of the majority to focus on the concerns of the minority.

c. Persistent Commitment

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will leave the sheep because they aren't his and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because he is merely hired and has no real concern for the sheep."

- John 10:11-16

Pastoral care can be satisfying and fulfilling, but it can also be messy, tiring and frustrating - especially when dealing with adolescents! Frequently our commitment to offering pastoral care to our young people will be tested as young people look to see if we will remain committed for the long haul.



Assess the extent to which you offer the quality of pastoral care to young people as taught and demonstrated by Jesus Himself. Respond to the statements below by placing an "x" on the line. Make notes underneath each item in order to clarify your own thinking:

NO _____ YES
"I accept young people as they are and provide care, not condemnation."

NO _____ YES
"I confront sin in young people in a clear but non-judgemental way."

NO _____ YES
"I generally notice when young people are in need and I look to be part of the solution."

NO _____ YES
"I offer hope to the anxious through my willingness to help and my confidence in God's promises."

NO _____ YES
"I am attracted to caring for those people whom others may tend to avoid or dismiss."

NO _____ YES
"I give particular attention to young people who might easily be overlooked."

NO _____ YES
"I provide pastoral care out of a genuine experience of compassion toward young people."

NO _____ YES
"I provide pastoral care for the individual even at the expense of the majority's immediate interests."

NO _____ YES
"I am persistent in my pastoral care and do not give up when it becomes difficult and inconvenient."

The areas I most want to work on are:

1.

2.

4. Pastoral Care in the Early Church

a. Pastoral care was the responsibility of everyone

⁴⁴ And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need. ⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.

- Acts 2:44-47

It was the quality of their relationships that made life in the early church so attractive to those outside. People recognised their responsibility to their fellow believer, and cared for them, rather than expecting the church leaders to do it.

"We warmly shake hands with people every Sunday who are about to come apart at the seams, and very often we don't know it until they really do."

- Lawrence Crabb,
Christian psychologist

b. Pastoral care was practical

³² All the believers were of one heart and mind, and they felt that what they owned was not their own; they shared everything they had.

- Acts 4:32

Pastoral care in the early church went beyond mere sympathy and concern for one's fellow believer. It resulted in practical action in which material needs were met as well as emotional.

c. Pastoral care was organised

¹ But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. Those who spoke Greek complained against those who spoke Hebrew, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. ² So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. "We apostles should spend our time preaching and teaching the word of God, not administering a food program," they said. ³ "Now look around among yourselves, brothers, and select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. We will put them in charge of this business.

- Acts 6:1-3

While all believers were responsible to care for each other in practical ways, there was some form of organisation put in place to ensure that no one was overlooked. Of particular concern were the needs of people not able to look after themselves.

Pastoral Care and Adolescence

1. Developmental Issues

There are certain features of adolescents that make pastoral care of them quite unique - they are people in transition undergoing significant developmental changes. These changes are dealt with in detail in the workbook "Adolescence". Our focus here is on how these changes affect the pastoral care we provide.

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 their feelings and to analyse reasons for them.

"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"

"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"

c. Social Development

The two great social “tasks” of adolescence are identity development and independence. The pastoral care we provide needs to keep these two tasks in mind as follows:

- i. Identity: In providing pastoral care we need to remember that what you see is not always what you 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 constructive and 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.

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.

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 unique and which impact our pastoral care 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.

"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"

2. Family Issues

In providing pastoral care for an adult we may have an awareness of their role and responsibility to their wider family but essentially we are caring for an independent individual.

However in the case of the adolescent, family roles and responsibilities exist in a more significant way. This impacts our pastoral care as follows:

a. Understanding

In understanding the young people we care for we need to develop an appreciation of the quality and dynamics of their home life. Knowing their parents and understanding their relationship with their teenager will be invaluable in explaining at least something of the way in which the teenager behaves. It will also provide a means for the pastoral carer to more accurately assess the validity of the adolescent's assessment of issues related to family life.

b. Accountability

The adolescent (in particular the early and mid-adolescent) is still the responsibility of a parent. When we embark on pastoral care we do so with deference to the role of the parent in their life. We need to be clear about where we stand on issues of accountability, disclosure and the adolescent's right to privacy (more on this in a later session).

c. Scope

We cannot effectively offer pastoral care to the adolescent in isolation. We have certain responsibilities to the family which are defined often by our age, maturity, closeness of relationship and seriousness of the issues that arise in the adolescent's life. Pastoral care for the adolescent can, for example, include counsel to parents on how best to handle issues related to their teenager's behaviour.

"In a survey of Teenage magazine (April/May 1986) readers, 66 percent of the teenagers surveyed said their family has the most influence in their lives, while only 27 percent said friends do. Youth workers weren't even on the list!"

- Dub Ambrose
and Walt Mueller,
"Ministry to Families
With Teenagers"

"I have never seen parents more hungry for help than they are now. Why are these parents so desperate? They feel helpless, not only with their children but with their lives as a whole. This desperation represents a teachable moment with parents that churches must not ignore."

- Mark DeVries,
"Family-Based Youth
Ministry"

Pastoral Care and Youth Ministry

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).

“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”



Assess the effectiveness of your youth ministry's pastoral care according to the criteria outlined. Respond to the statements below by placing an "x" on the line. Make notes underneath each item in order to clarify your own thinking:

NO YES

"We have a systematic pastoral care programme that sees every person receiving individual care." _____

NO YES

"We intentionally teach and model a shared responsibility for pastoral care." _____

NO YES

"We have a clear process and specific criteria for ensuring only appropriate people provide adult care." _____

NO YES

"We have clear guidelines as to who is responsible for pastoral care and how it is to be provided." _____

The areas we most need to work on are:

1.

2.



Which model of pastoral care is most suited to your youth ministry:



Which aspects of other pastoral care models could realistically be incorporated into your youth ministry:

For Further Thought...

Assess your youth ministry's effectiveness in providing pastoral care. What are the "gaps"? What can be done to improve your effectiveness in caring for young people?



