

Shepherding God's People in Prayer

By: Shenalyn Page

One of the most beautiful pictures of Jesus in the Bible is that of the Good Shepherd caring tenderly for His sheep. Twelve times Scripture calls Him our Shepherd. Throughout His ministry on earth we see Him shepherding the people - guiding, teaching, comforting, caring. In Ezekiel 34:11, the Lord God says, "Indeed I myself will search for My sheep and seek them out."

God has appointed under-shepherds to care for His flock. "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers... being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." 1 Peter 5:2-4.

Here's the important thing: As a prayer leader in your church, God has called you to be an under-shepherd. You may not be the main shepherd in your church, but you have a responsibility to care for God's people just the same.

Just what does that look like?

"The definition of shepherding is leading the people of God to walk with God." ¹ Your job as a prayer ministry leader is to teach people how to walk with God in a life-changing prayer relationship. God's people "must wrap their heart around the things of God before they will do the will of God... You must know where you want the people of God to go in their relationship with God."²

Think of how Jesus shepherded his disciples - He taught them how to pray (Matthew 6:5-13), how to relate to God (Luke 11:5-13), and what to pray for (Matthew 9:37-38) . He showed them how to interpret scripture (Luke 24:24-27) and live in connection with God (John 14:21-24). He taught them how to relate to each other and minister to each others needs (John 13:1-17). He demonstrated how to interpret circumstances and recognize God's leading (Luke 4:42-44). these are all things God wants us to do as prayer leaders.

How do you do these things? **Most importantly, you love.** "[Jesus] mentioned only one condition of discipleship and service. "Lovest thou Me?" He said. This is the essential qualification [of a shepherd]. Though Peter might possess every other, without the love of Christ he could not be a faithful shepherd over the Lord's flock. Knowledge, benevolence, eloquence, gratitude, and zeal are all aids in the good work; but without the love of Jesus in the heart, the work of the Christian minister will prove a failure."³

Secondly, you pray for your people. God has called you to lead His people into a deeper prayer walk with Him. You cannot do this without intercessory prayer for each of your people. Dedicate time to interceding for the members of your church and their individual needs. Especially pray for them to understand the greatness of God's love and His power to transform. Praying the intercessory prayers of Paul are a wonderful way to pray according to God's will for people in your care.

Five Tools for Shepherding

John Franklin gives a helpful explanation of five tools for shepherding in his book, *And the Place was Shaken, How to Lead Powerful a Prayer Meeting*.⁴

1. **Live a Life of Integrity:** As a shepherd of God's people, your own life must be saturated with God through prayer and the Word. Your people will follow your example. Live in such a way that they are safe to follow your footsteps. "Imitate me just as I also imitate Christ." 1 Corinthians 11:1
2. **Have a Shepherd's Heart:** Cultivate your identity as an under-shepherd by spending significant time with the Good Shepherd. Pray that God will give you His love and care for His sheep. Then seek to care for people as Jesus does.
3. **Design a Format to Guide God's People:** The format you choose for prayer meetings can set the focus on problems or on God and His goodness. Choose prayer topics, Scriptures, and activities that help people focus on the greatness of God and His power to save. If you are not intentional about the focus and goal your prayer meeting, it can easily become a gripe and gossip session. Prevent that by prayerfully planning each prayer meeting to focus on God.
4. **Use Activities to Teach People How to Relate to God and Others:** The Biblical concept of teaching refers primarily to the character development of the student. "The Bible only considers a disciple to have learned when he practices a Biblical command."⁵ This is because we learn best by doing.

The things you do with people in prayer meeting show them how to relate to God and His Word. "If you have people read the Word of God, share what God has done that week in their lives, or explain how they came to recognize God's speaking from Scripture, you set a pattern for their private prayer life."⁶ These activities teach them to focus on God, listen to Him and act on what He says. Activities that have members minister to each other teach them how to love and care for the body of Christ.

This is an incredible opportunity to help people grow in their personal walk with God. Don't take it lightly! Plead with God for His wisdom and for the Holy Spirit to teach through you!

5. **Speak as a Shepherd:** The words you use in teaching God's people have the potential for great impact on people's lives. Pray for God to give you words that: 1) Target people's hearts and help them experience transformation in their lives. Remember that only the power of the Holy Spirit can make this a reality in your teaching. 2) Explain what God is doing and give people understanding of why they do what they do in prayer meetings. "As a leader you will have multiple opportunities to interpret how to pray, what answers to prayer mean, what pleases God, and what he likes or dislikes."⁷ 3) Express passion for God and His work, encourage people in their walk with God, and demonstrate the love of God.

Shepherding in Prayer in Action

Pastor Pavel Goia tells a story that illustrates the role and work of a shepherd well.⁸ One of his church members was struggling with depression following several significant tragedies. He called Pastor Goia, complaining that God wasn't listening to him and didn't care about his problems. Pastor Goia responded by helping him understand that God sometimes allows challenges to help us grow. He also showed him how change the course of this prayers to line up with what God was doing.

Pastor Goia asked the man to do three things: 1) find ten promises and read them to God out-loud, 2) write down ten answers to prayer he has seen, 3) call someone else and tell them those ten promises and answers to prayer. The man was hesitant, but did what Pastor Goia asked. He then spent the night praying for the man. The next morning the man called him back, amazed at what God had done. He'd experienced peace for the first time in two years as he reviewed God's promises. And his phone call to a discouraged friend had prevented that friend's suicide.

Do you see how Pastor Goia was shepherded his church member, teaching him how to respond to God, how to pray and how to minister to others? This is what God has called each of us to do as his under-shepherds in prayer ministry.

¹ Franklin, John. *And the Place was Shaken*. Broadman & Holman Publishers. 2005. p. 132.

² Ibid. p. 140-141.

³ White, Ellen. *Gospel Workers*. eBook Copyright © 2010, Ellen G. White Estate, Inc. 1915. p. 183.

⁴ Ibid. p. 134-147. Adapted.

⁵ Ibid. p. 136.

⁶ Ibid. p. 137.

⁷ Ibid. p. 143.

⁸ Goia, Pavel. Sermon "The Real Prayer that Get's Results". <https://www.audioverse.org/english/sermons/recordings/15207/part-1-the-real-prayer-that-gets-results.html>