

**PASTORAL
CARE**

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Pastoral Care
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*A SUBJECTIVE
INTERPRETATION
OF WHAT "IT"
MEANS TO ME*

PASTORAL CARE:

In order to define my understanding and determine “what it means to me, it is necessary (in my opinion) to define and identify the meaning of the words.

MAIN ENTRY: ¹pas-to-ral¹

Function: *adjective*

Etymology: Middle English, from Latin *pastoralis*, from *pastor* herdsman

1 a (1) : of, relating to, or composed of shepherds or herdsmen (2) : devoted to or based on livestock raising **b** : of or relating to the countryside : not urban <a *pastoral* setting> **c** : portraying or expressive of the life of shepherds or country people especially in an idealized and conventionalized manner <*pastoral* poetry> **d** : pleasingly peaceful and innocent : **IDYLLIC**
2 a : of or relating to spiritual care or guidance especially of a congregation **b** : of or relating to the pastor of a church

MAIN ENTRY: ¹care²

Function: *noun*

Etymology: Middle English, from Old English *caru*; akin to Old High German *kara* lament, Old Irish *gairm* call, cry, Latin *garrere* to chatter

1 : suffering of mind : **GRIEF**
2 a : a disquieted state of mixed uncertainty, apprehension, and responsibility **b** : a cause for such anxiety
3 a : painstaking or watchful attention **b** : **MAINTENANCE** <floor-*care* products>
4 : regard coming from desire or esteem
5 : **CHARGE, SUPERVISION** <under a doctor's *care*>
6 : a person or thing that is an object of attention, anxiety, or solicitude

¹ The Merriam-Webster online dictionary: <http://merriam-webster.com/>

² The Merriam-Webster online dictionary: <http://merriam-webster.com/>

*PASTOR | SHEPHERD*³

Strong's Number: 4166	Browse Lexicon
Original Word	Word Origin
poinhvn	of uncertain affinity
Transliterated Word	TDNT Entry
Poimen	6:485,901
Phonetic Spelling	Parts of Speech
<i>poy-mane'</i>	Noun Masculine
Definition	

1. a herdsman, esp. a shepherd
 - a. in the parable, he to whose care and control others have committed themselves, and whose precepts they follow
2. metaph.
 - a. the presiding officer, manager, director, of any assembly: so of Christ the Head of the church
 1. of the overseers of the Christian assemblies
 2. of kings and princes

The tasks of a Near Eastern shepherd were: - to watch for enemies trying to attack the sheep - to defend the sheep from attackers - to heal the wounded and sick sheep - to find and save lost or trapped sheep - to love them, sharing their lives and so earning their trust.

The definitions listed above conjure a number of parallel images in my mind and invite me to consider the “wordplay” or dual meaning of the phrase “pastoral care” as well. Certainly the primary definition, or perhaps the definition we might first give thought to, would be caring for God’s flock. After all, the pastor is considered to be a shepherd, and shepherds tend flocks. I think we could give scriptural credence to this position as well considering it was one of the directives given by Jesus to his disciples. He used himself as the example of a shepherd caring for the flock on several occasions. The translation was not lost on his hearers either as we read of Jesus speaking to Peter, he specifically tells him; “...feed my sheep.”⁴ Decades later the words

³ Word Study courtesy of Crosswalk.com Bible Study Tools: <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/Greek/>

⁴ John 21:17

of Christ are not forgotten by Peter as he recalls the command given to him by our Lord; when writing to the persecuted Christians, he reminds the shepherd-pastors "...be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve."⁵ So then, it is understandable to assume the primary definition of *pastoral care* can be connected with "care giving." In other words, it may be construed as something done by one person...for another person(s). I believe this is a fair assumption, and for the most part, an accurate assessment. In contrast, as the role and responsibility of pastoral care (defined as the care giver) comes into focus, the condition of the *carer* and the ability to *give* care by the care giver becomes critical to my interpretation and understanding of all that pastoral care fully embodies. So then, however accurate and fair the original assumption is (pastoral care as care-giver) and before accepting it in full, we must ask the question "how did Jesus *care*, and what was his primary role as the One who is the model of pastoral care...*the* Good Shepherd?"

The Gospel of John relates Jesus saying, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep."⁶ I believe there is much that can be unpacked in this statement, but I wish to concentrate on a couple of specific points. The first point, which has already been mentioned, is Jesus' self-proclamation "I am the good shepherd." Recalling our definitions illustrating pastoral care, and operating under the *assumption* that pastoral care *should* be "good" care, I take Jesus' statement to say; "I am your model for pastoral care...I set the standard...I am the benchmark." Therefore, in order to understand the role and expectations of/for pastoral care, it is implicit that any person providing (real) pastoral care must know Jesus. So, precept number one, relative to pastoral care, is knowing Jesus. Understanding or defining what it means to know Jesus can be subject to interpretation; therefore, I propose using the Bible as the source for defining how we can know Jesus.

The question might first be posed; "can we know Jesus?" My answer, according to scripture, is yes. As it has been noted previously, Jesus made the claim that his followers "know" him (John 6:14-15), and echoing similar enforcement of the idea, the apostle John writes in his first epistle:

⁵ 1 Peter 5:2

⁶ John 6:14-15

“³ We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. ⁴ The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love {5 Or word, love for God} is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.”⁷

Therefore, according to these verses, we can know him. We can know him by following him, and we can know him by being obedient to him. Most importantly, we can know him by modeling his behavior and lifestyle in the process of becoming *one* with him.

Additional insight comes into focus when Jesus’ teaching from the gospel of John is realized. Jesus speaks to his disciples as well as others about “oneness.” He describes this oneness as the Father (God Almighty) being in him (Jesus), and him being in the Father. He further elaborates this teaching by illustrating that his disciples (and I believe present-day followers as well) will know him in a capacity which embodies godly knowledge. The text for this support follows:

⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” ⁸Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. ¹⁵“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. ²⁵“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Helper, the Holy

⁷ 1 John 2:3-6

Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.⁸

While this teaching seems self-explanatory, Jesus takes a moment to give further illustration with an allegory that leaves little room for poor interpretation of his point. Jesus' words are recorded as follows:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. ³ You have already been pruned for greater fruitfulness by the message I have given you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful apart from me. ⁵ "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Anyone who parts from me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. ⁷ But if you stay joined to me and my words remain in you, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted! ⁸ My true disciples produce much fruit. This brings great glory to my Father. ⁹ "I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. ¹⁰ When you obey me, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! ¹² I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you. ¹³ And here is how to measure it -- the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you obey me. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a master doesn't confide in his servants. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. ¹⁶ You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. ¹⁷ I command you to love each other.⁹

⁸ John 14 English Standard Version (ESV) The Holy Bible, English Standard Version Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

⁹ John 15:1-17 New Living Translation (NLT) Holy Bible. New Living Translation copyright © 1996, 2004 by Tyndale Charitable Trust. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers.

These definitions and teachings of Jesus are (I believe) the foundation, guiding principles, and mandate that his followers should be led by. I am hard-pressed to consider pastoral care (true pastoral care) emanating from any other starting point. It is my firm conviction that this type of care begins with, and is sustained by, an intimate relationship with Jesus. It is from this intimate (vine-branch) relationship that I believe awareness, understanding, and passion for the will of God the Father becomes paramount in the heart of the pastor (and follower of Jesus) and thus, he is truly able to *know* Jesus.

Having shared my understanding and definition of pastoral care, and defining my foundation from where it (pastoral care) proceeds, I can share some additional thoughts. I believe there are some inextricably linked connections with discipleship, pastoral care, and being a “grafted-in” child of the Living God. For starters, the great commandment (aka the Sh’ma Yisrael) comes to mind as the cornerstone of our faith. Although the *Shema* is intrinsically Jewish, Jesus expressed to his disciples and the teachers of the law that this was indeed (and simply) the greatest commandment; period. In the fullest context, the great commandment is as follows:

⁴ “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”¹⁰

As mentioned, Jesus follows this teaching, or reiterates it as it has been recorded in the gospel account.¹¹ So then, to summarize my position thus far, Jesus is the Good Shepherd. As followers of Jesus, his disciples should model his lifestyle in all that they do. Jesus stated that “his work” was the work of *The Father*. He stated that he only acted and spoke according to what he had seen in the Father. He stated that he and the Father were one; he went on to add that his followers

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 6:4-15 (ESV)

¹¹ Matthew 22:36-38

should be linked to him as he was linked to the Father. This is the basis of being a pastor-shepherd and for providing all *pastoral* care.

There are a few thoughts that I would like to share in addition to what I have laid as my foundation. These thoughts may seem somewhat disjointed if I simply “toss” them out into the paper, so my form for introduction and explanation will come by way of a question/answer format.

So you have explained your position on what you believe the foundation of pastoral care is, but that is your *foundation*. What does the pastoral care look like itself?

My assumption is that pastoral care begins with the mind and spirit of Christ; following that premise, pastoral care is truly a pouring out of oneself. Once more, from the Gospel of John, Jesus is recorded saying; “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”¹² This statement is absolutely loaded, but the applicable point for my purposes today is “I lay down my life for the sheep.” As shepherd-pastors following the model of Jesus, we should be prepared to do likewise. Of course, this might be considered to be an extrapolation by some readers, but that consideration is dispelled when the words of the apostle John are remembered. John writes in his first epistle, “...he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”¹³ This is the type of care and concern that Jesus exhibited for his *sheep*. Consequently, it should be the same care and concern that his followers exhibit and pour out for the *sheep* entrusted into their care.

It is my contention that my life is not my own. Surely that comment can come off sounding like a “clanging gong” if not entirely self-righteous; regardless of how it sounds, it is true. Throughout the teachings contained in the gospels and the apostolic writings, one truth continually rings out

¹² John 10:14-18 (ESV)

¹³ 1 John 3:16

to my heart; “your life is not your own...you have been bought with a price.” I know that price to be the blood of Jesus Christ, my savior. As John writes, “he laid down his life, and we should follow suit.” To be sure, Paul echo’s similarly with his words to the Galatian church; “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”¹⁴ Jesus repeatedly referred to much of his purpose as being “to give the Father much glory...”¹⁵ It seems fitting, with this knowledge, his followers should do the same. I am reminded of the lesson Jesus teaches his disciples saying, “The truth is, a kernel of wheat must be planted in the soil. Unless it dies it will be alone -- a single seed. But its death will produce many new kernels - - a plentiful harvest of new lives. Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who despise their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. All those who want to be my disciples must come and follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And if they follow me, the Father will honor them.”¹⁶ This reads as a very good summary of how we, as followers of Jesus, can bring the Godhead glory...the prerequisite though, is for the follower to have “died” to “self.” What does pastoral care look like? Pastoral care looks selfless. Pastoral care often puts others before self, but that comes with a caveat. Self care is a prerequisite for effective pastoral care; and so, we come full circle.

You still have not adequately described what pastoral care looks like in practice. Can you be more specific with your description of what *practical* application of pastoral care looks like?

I think pastoral care can have many different looks. I realize that sounds ambiguous and may have the semblance of my not having a true definition or understanding. However, I don’t think that is the case at all. I think practical application is being connected to the Father...walking in concert with Jesus, the Son. This connected walk is what pastoral care looks like. In the book of the prophet Jeremiah, God speaks of a wonderful illustration in His words describing his expectation and purpose for His people. The story follows:

¹⁴ Galatians 2:20

¹⁵ Matt. 5:16, Matt. 16:27, Mar 8:38, Luke 9:26, John 8:54, Eph 1:17, Phi 2:11, Phi 4:20, 2Peter 1:17, Rev 1:6

¹⁶ John 12:24-26 New Living Translation (NLT) Holy Bible. New Living Translation copyright © 1996, 2004 by Tyndale Charitable Trust. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers.

This is what the LORD said to me: "Go and buy a linen belt and put it around your waist, but do not wash it." ² So I bought the belt as the LORD directed me and put it around my waist. ³ Then the LORD gave me another message: ⁴ "Take the linen belt you are wearing, and go to the Euphrates River.¹ Hide it there in a hole in the rocks." ⁵ So I went and hid it at the Euphrates as the LORD had instructed me. ⁶ A long time afterward, the LORD said to me, "Go back to the Euphrates and get the linen belt that I told you to hide there." ⁷ So I went to the Euphrates and dug it out of the hole where I had hidden it. But now it was mildewed and falling apart. The belt was useless. ⁸ Then I received this message from the LORD: ⁹ "The LORD says: This illustrates how I will rot away the pride of Judah and Jerusalem. ¹⁰ These wicked people refuse to listen to me. They stubbornly follow their own desires and worship idols. Therefore, they will become like this linen belt -- good for nothing! ¹¹ As a belt clings to a person's waist, so I created Judah and Israel to cling to me," says the LORD. "They were to be my people, my pride, my glory -- an honor to my name."¹⁷

I cannot help but fall in love with that analogy...“they were to be my people, my pride, my glory – an honor to my name.” What a legacy! What an honor and privilege to serve in connection with our God in this way. It is incredible for me to imagine, but this is what we have again been called to do. The difference is that we are now called to this order connected to Jesus. This is the connection to His glory...bringing glory to the Father. The evidence of pastoral care will be self-evident provided that we are in the place of the “linen belt;” provided that we are “grafted in” to the true vine. When we are walking “plugged-in” as it were, into the very source of life, we will be the conduit by which pastoral care takes place...and this will be two-fold. There will be ministry of spirit in the caregiver and there will be ministry dispatched to those in need of care. The “how” it will look may “look” different from circumstance to circumstance, but as long as the caregiver is wrapped around the “waist of God” as a linen belt...rest assured that proper pastoral care will be taking place.

¹⁷ Jeremiah 13:1-11 (NLT)

How does a caregiver keep up with the pressures and demands that this type of relationship produces?

Once again, it is necessary to remain connected. God the Father has given us a rich legacy of example and instruction by which to follow. Jesus, the Son, has given us a rich legacy as well. We have been afforded the grace and privilege of many saints going before us who have left us stories, instructions, oral history, and written diaries that we can use as encouragement and evidence of what works. As a people of God, we have many disciplines that we can observe to help build us up in our faith. There is prayer, Bible reading, study, times of solitude, fasting, confession and accountability; and these are but a few of the roads that will keep us fit for the spiritual battles that will be faced. By continuing in a regular disciplined daily life, we ready ourselves...our “spiritual muscle memory” as it were to be ready for action when called upon. Living in this place regularly keeps our spirit in tune with the Holy Spirit which dwells within us helping us to remain sensitive and in synch with His guidance at all times. This manner of lifestyle keeps the caregiver (pastor-shepherd) perpetually “filled” as well. Therefore, when a need arises, there is the “something” to pour out for those in need. Two illustrations come to mind as comparison and contrast as support for my claim. The first is the negative. Another story from Jeremiah comes to mind for illustration. “For my people have done two evil things: They have forsaken me -- the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!”¹⁸ If the message is not obvious, it is this; as pastor-shepherds...caregivers, and life-givers...we cannot be without the source of life. The analogy of becoming a “vessel” is often used as a type of ministry device. If we (us) as a vessel are defective (cracked), we are the cisterns that God refers to through the prophet Jeremiah. We cannot forsake Him, the fountain of living water. He keeps us functional and fashions us into the noble tools he desires to use in order to perform the life-giving ministry to His people.¹⁹ It is critical that when God brings a soul across our “well” that we have ample to pour out to them. There is no excuse to be without; it is tantamount to an abomination.²⁰

¹⁸ Jeremiah 2:13

¹⁹ 2 Timothy 2:20

²⁰ Jeremiah 14:3 – “*The nobles send servants to get water, but all the wells are dry. The servants return with empty pitchers, confused and desperate, covering their heads in grief*”

I said there are two illustrations; there are, and the second is more positive than the broken cisterns. It provides us with insight to our baseline or foundation as well as teaching us how to remain plugged in. The story comes from the book of Daniel and can be picked up from chapter six; our details follow:

⁷ "All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. ⁸ "Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter." ⁹ Therefore King Darius signed the written decree. ¹⁰ Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.²¹

The Bible says; "...as was his custom since early days." It refers to his habit of prayer and praise to God. What pastoral care means to me is being in this place that Daniel lived. I want my life to be a life of "custom." I want to continually practice the presence of God, and in so doing, I am unflinchingly convinced that each day will take care of itself... The care needed to perform in the role of shepherd to God's sheep will be ready to dispense. My vessel will not be cracked and there will be life-giving water to pour out on God's needing people. I will have the discernment necessary to know when and how to help. And most importantly, I will be walking as Jesus walked and sharing in his mission.

Amen.

²¹ Daniel 6:10 New King James Version (NKJV) Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.