

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,
on Sunday, June 12, 1988, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

EPHESIANS 4:11

“He gave some to be...pastors.”

ARE YOU A PASTOR?

My first pastorate after coming from Canada to the United States was at the Stone Presbyterian Church in the delightful old college town of Clinton, New York, a residential suburb of the city of Utica. The chairman of the pulpit committee was professor of Greek at Hamilton College, and he told me, the first time we met, that when the committee had sat down to consider what they were looking for in a new pastor, they came up with a long and formidable list of qualifications. “Then,” he said, “we looked at that list, and began to laugh, because we realized that even the Apostle Paul wouldn’t have been an eligible candidate! We had been looking for a man who was competent at everything except perhaps walking on water!” I hastily informed him that I didn’t even water ski.

I think that illustrates a view which still persists in some circles, namely, that the pastor is hired by the congregation to do most of the work of the church. And the better the pastor, the more the people of the church can relax and become spectators.

Such an idea, of course, is outdated and unbiblical, and I don’t think anyone here at Faith believes it. We know that the biblical view of the Church as the Body of Christ is that it is an organism, with all the members having their unique gifts and functions. The best pastor is not one who tries to do all the work himself, but rather, one who makes sure that each member is working hard at using his or her spiritual gift.

The Greek word for “pastor” is “poimen,” which means “shepherd.” The word appears 17 times in the New Testament, but only once is it translated “pastor,” and that is in our text. The other 16 times it is rendered “shepherd.” Indeed “pastor” is the Latin word for “shepherd.”

Now the word “pastor” in current vocabulary signifies the person who is called to be the leader of a local congregation. He is also called the “minister” or the “preacher.” How often it is said of a minister, “He’s a fine pastor, but his preaching leaves much to be desired!” Or perhaps it is the reverse, “He’s a splendid preacher, but he’s not really a shepherd of the flock!” And those assessments are true. God may give a person the ability to be an inspiring preacher, but He may not give him the spiritual gift of “pastor” or “shepherd.”

We must remember that the “pastor” is only one of many members of the Body of Christ, and he certainly does not possess all the spiritual gifts. He is not the Chief Shepherd; that title is reserved for our Lord alone. Peter, in his first letter (1 Peter 5:2), exhorts the elders to “be shepherds (pastors) of God’s flock that is under your care, so that when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” Christ is the Chief

Shepherd, and the rest of us are “Undershepherds”; and many a Christian believer who has not been called to the office of pastor has nevertheless been given this shepherding gift. The same word translated “pastor” is used in its verbal form by Jesus in John 21:17, when He commissioned Peter to “shepherd or feed My sheep.” Anyone who has the gift of feeding or shepherding fellow believers has the gift of “pastor.”

It may strike you as strange when you first hear that a successful “pastor” does not necessarily possess the pastoral gift. In fact, very few ministers of large, growing churches do have the gift of pastor. If they had, they wouldn’t be where they are!

Let me define for you what I believe the pastoral gift is: the gift of pastor is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to assume a long-term personal responsibility for the spiritual welfare of another believer or group of believers.

I think it is helpful to distinguish clearly between the office of pastor and the gift of pastor. Most of those we call “pastors” in America are people occupying the office of pastor. They have a staff position in the church. The pastor of a congregation is the person responsible under Jesus, Who is the Chief Shepherd, for preaching and teaching the Word, feeding the souls of the people, healing their wounds, helping them find and develop and use their spiritual gifts, equipping them for service, guarding them against false doctrine, developing unity within the Body, and doing whatever else is necessary to see that they continue in the faith, and experience spiritual growth in their lives as individual believers.

But the point I want to make is that not everyone who holds the office of pastor needs to have the gift of pastor. I think of Dr. Campbell Morgan, pastor for many years of one of the great evangelical churches of London, Westminster Chapel. He was a brilliant preacher and Bible teacher, and thousands were led to Christ through his ministry. But he did not have the pastoral gift. He used to say that his ideal would be to have a house in the woods, with a path from the house to his church. He would study and pray and walk the path three times a week to preach, and then return to his home in the woods! But Dr. Morgan knew that a great number of people in his congregation had the gift of pastor. They had been trained to exercise their gift, and they derived great joy and fulfilment in ministering to the members of the congregation who needed pastoral care.

Now as soon as we understand that the gift of pastor is not necessarily what your minister has, a vast and exciting possibility is opened for lay-people to begin to exercise the gift of pastor. I’m not saying that because I’m looking for a copout. In fact, on the Spiritual Gifts Inventory, my highest scores were in the gifts of pastoring and teaching, and I love my pastoral gift because I love people. But, it is often assumed that when a church hires a pastor and pays his salary, they are paying him to do the pastoral work for them. But by so doing they may, unknowingly, be throttling the growth of their church, and not understand the reason why.

Would you please look now at the Bulletin insert? This is a diagram prepared by Dr. Peter Wagner of Fuller Theological Seminary, to illustrate the best way to ensure a congregation’s growth. I presume that most, if not all of us here at Faith, desire to see our church grow in numerical and spiritual strength.

Of course, we recognize that some people feel very comfortable in a small church where everyone knows everyone else; but we believe that in a community such as ours, with a teeming population, and so many people without Christ, we need to reach out and seek to win them for the Lord, and then help them grow into Christian maturity. One of the reasons I decided to preach on the spiritual gifts is that I want you all to get geared up to face the challenges presented by a growing congregation. Aren't you thrilled at the prospect of using your gifts in the strengthening of new believers?

You will notice on the diagram an arrow pointing toward the right which says "Church Growth Potential." What is the most important factor which will determine whether or not a congregation will experience steady and healthy growth? It is the congregation, as individuals, and as groups, doing the major part of the ministering and pastoring and shepherding.

You see that on the top level, where the pastor does most of the ministering, there is very little growth potential. Actually, no pastor, however hardworking he may be, can adequately minister to more than 200 families, and even then, he is pushing the limit. Of course, some pastors don't want a large congregation. They prefer to keep the reins in their own hands. They may find it difficult or impossible to delegate work to others. Some are foolish enough to believe that no one in the congregation could do the work of ministry as well as they could! They like to be in complete control of things themselves. A congregation with that kind of leadership will never grow because that kind of pastor plays the role of a doer, an employee, a shepherd, and a chaplain to a few families.

How many sheep can an Eastern shepherd handle? Jesus told the parable about the shepherd who had 100 sheep (Luke 15:1-7). When we were in Palestine I never saw a shepherd with more than 30 or 40 sheep.

Now notice that if the pastor gives no opportunity to the congregation to use their shepherding gift, if he wants to do everything himself, he becomes a virtual dictator, and there will be zero growth potential in that church. On the other hand, if he places all of the pastoring in the hands of the congregation, he abdicates his role as pastor, and that would be very wrong. There are many, many situations in which members want, and have the right to expect, the help of their pastor and no one else. There are counseling situations where the ministry of the pastor is both needed and wanted; and as a faithful shepherd, he will never delegate to others what is his own clear responsibility.

But you can see from the diagram that where the congregation is allowed and encouraged and challenged to share in the ministry of shepherding by the use of their spiritual gifts, there is tremendous growth potential, and the pastor's role in this situation is that of equipper of the saints, recruiter, rancher, general. In a word, if a congregation expects steady and healthy growth, then the pastor must be a rancher rather than a shepherd.

Think for a moment of one of those great sheep ranches in the "outback" of Australia, with thousands of acres and thousands of sheep. The rancher couldn't possibly be a shepherd to all those sheep. His job is mainly one of administration and oversight of the dozens of ranch hands

who are out there seeing to the welfare of the individual sheep and lambs. It is the ranch hands who are where the rubber meets the road, and without them the operation of the ranch would be impossible.

Have you ever thought of yourself as a ranch hand for the Lord? Isn't it exciting to think of how many sheep we could care for if we recruit enough of you as undershepherds and ranch hands?!

Picture in your mind one church which has challenged its members to undertake a shepherding ministry. Dr. Robert Schuller, the pastor of the Garden Grove Community Church in Anaheim, California, like most other super-church pastors, does not have the gift of pastor. But one reason why the "Crystal Cathedral," as it is popularly called, has enjoyed a steady pattern of growth over more than 20 years, is that the members of the church do receive the pastoral care they need. At one-time Garden Grove had only 200 members and a pastor who did not have the pastoral gift. The only difference was that that congregation did not plateau because Pastor Schuller understood that if he was not going to be able to give the necessary pastoral care to his church members, others would have to do it for him. At the present time, the church has about 550 lay ministers of pastoral care attending to the pastoral work of the 10,000-member church, under the general supervision of a ministerial staff member, Reverend David Bailey. That is about 6% of the membership doing this shepherding work, and each lay minister is assigned from eight to ten families to care for.

The largest church in the world is the great Pentecostal Church in Seoul, Korea, where Dr. Yonggi Cho is pastor. They have now almost 500,000 members, with over 40,000 deacons handling the pastoral work. It is mind-boggling, isn't it?

What is the nature of the shepherding gift? Let me give you three "C's"! Those with the gift of pastor will guide the sheep, graze the sheep, and guard the sheep.

1. They will guide the sheep. A good shepherd will always guide his sheep to where they ought to go. Patricia, a fairly new Christian and a high school senior, had been swept off her feet in a whirlwind courtship by a fine Christian who was a college junior. After only a short acquaintance, they announced, quietly among youthful friends, not only their informal engagement, but also their intention to get married in about two months' time. Here was a definite need for someone with the shepherding gift to tactfully guide her in paths of righteous sanity. Providentially, a youth leader whom Patricia respected greatly pointed out to her that neither of them had a job, that far too insufficient time had elapsed for them to begin to know each other, that the Bible presents a serious view of marriage which demands much more consideration before entering such a sacred union. Not her pastor, but a wise and sensitive youth leader in her church with the pastoral gift shepherded her from her rash and precipitous course.

2. They will graze the sheep. The major duty of a shepherd is to lead the sheep into the best grazing areas where they may feed contentedly and well. Dr. John Stott, perhaps the finest preacher in England today, and a chaplain to Queen Elizabeth, was converted when he was 17. He came from a non-religious background. His father, Sir Adrian Stott, a famous British physician, but an agnostic, virtually disowned his son when he became a Christian. However, a

wonderful Christian man, in his thirties, made it one of his top priorities to help and encourage, and be a shepherd to this brilliant young student who was about to go up to Cambridge as an undergraduate. And for five years that man wrote Stott a letter every week, and visited with him during vacation times, opening up the Scriptures to him, and answering the many questions the young convert raised. And today Dr. Stott would tell you that that shepherd and pastor, although a layman, was the greatest influence for good in his life during those formative years. That man had the gift of pastoring.

3. **They will guard the sheep** as David, the shepherd boy guarded his sheep from the lion and the bear (1 Samuel 17,34-37). Paul knew that false teachers would dog his steps, hounding the flocks he established. This is why he urged the elders at Ephesus, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the Church of God... I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock... So be on your guard!” (Acts 20:28-31). For one pastor to keep an alert eye on hundreds of sheep, lest they begin to wander, is utterly impossible, nor was it ever meant to be. That is why all members with the pastoring gift must use it for the safeguarding of the whole church.

How is this gift of pastoring or shepherding used in the Church today, and by whom?

1. **Godly ruling elders possess this gift.** The Book of Order (10—6) of our Evangelical Presbyterian Church has this to say:

The Ruling Elder should become adept at leading worship and at leading in prayer. As an Undershepherd, that person should visit the sick, the bereaved, the lonely, the aged, the shut-in, and all those who have a pastoral need. In cases where there is a special need, the Ruling Elder shall be careful to inform the Pastor. It is especially incumbent upon the Ruling Elder to see to the development of the children of the congregation, to inquire after the inactive members, to encourage new members in spiritual development, and to otherwise show care for those whom they serve.

2. **Sunday School teachers and youth advisors have ample opportunity to utilize the shepherding gift.** Young people characteristically turn to friends like these, rather than their parents, for direction and encouragement.

3. **Older Christian women can shepherd younger wives in family problems and domestic situations.** Paul exhorted the older Christian women “to train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home and to be kind...” (Titus 2:4,5).

4. **In home Bible study and prayer groups believers can shepherd and pastor one another.** Problems can be discussed in the light of God’s Word and one believer can help and encourage another in a relaxed and informal pastoral setting.

5. **Through the writing of letters some Christians express this gift of shepherding.** After all, three of Paul’s letters, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are called “pastoral letters” for they are letters of encouragement to two of Paul’s young sons in the faith. Perhaps you are gifted to write

letters of encouragement, or instruction, or warning to some fellow believer.

6. **Some churches have a “shepherd plan” for new believers.** Each new Christian is assigned a mature believer whose responsibility it is to take the new convert under his or her wing, see that he attends services regularly, call him if absent, encourage him in daily Bible reading and prayer, guard him from false teaching, be a friend to whom he may come at any time for help, and guide him into some form of Christian service where his gifts can be used.

7. **And of course, our telephone campaign will be a pastoring campaign in which, as shepherds, we will be seeking out God’s lost sheep!**

Perhaps more Christians possess the shepherding gift than we realize. I am convinced that if more Christians would guide, feed and guard fellow believers, the Church would experience a sweeping revival.

Reflect upon these things, and if you feel convinced that God has gifted you as a true pastor-shepherd, then determine to use your gift in the Master’s service; for in so doing, great will be your reward in heaven!

AMEN.

(Chart attached)