

METAPHORS FOR A PASTOR

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The noblest of all callings that God could give to a man is to be a carer of the souls whom Christ has purchased with His own blood. To feed God's people the Word, to shepherd God's people through the journeys and trials of life, to counsel God's people through unforeseen and painful heartaches, to protect God's people from dangerous doctrines and teachers, to remind God's people of the unchanging gospel and the sure-reality of heaven are just a few of the immense privileges that God places upon a pastor. But how does the Bible describe a pastor? What are some of the figures of speech that the Spirit of God employs to describe this calling? This essay will bring forth seven metaphors that speak of the pastor and his work.

1. Watchman (Ezekiel 33:1-9)

Watchmen are workers. They busy themselves by vigilantly keeping guard to protect the population that they are called to oversee. God told Ezekiel that he was appointed as a watchman for His people so that when he hears a message from God he is to give the people a warning from God. If he receives God's message but chooses to *not* warn the people, then he will be guilty as an unfaithful watchman. But if he receives God's message and *does warn* the people, then has delivered himself. When danger comes, the watchmen *must* sound the alarm to protect the citizens. The watchman cannot sleep or be careless; nor can he be indifferent or lazy. He must stay awake, be vigilant, be watchful, and be alert at all times because danger can loom from all fronts -- from both far away and from near (even from within at times!). So a pastor must also watch the flock to guard from encroaching danger from the outside and the inside.

2. Workman (2 Tim 2:15)

Workmen exert all their energy to do the required duties to the best of their abilities. Paul commands young pastor Timothy to be diligent to present himself approved to God as a *workman* who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. Consider a soldier who is faithful to please his commanding officer. Consider an athlete who works hard and competes according to the rules. Consider a farmer who works hard to receive his share of the crops. Just as a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer distinguish themselves by their zealous effort and tireless work-ethic, so ministers of the gospel must similarly be *workers* in the exegesis and expositing of God's word. All who desire the privilege of shepherd-leadership desire a fine *work*.

3. Shepherd (John 21:15-17)

No one really desired to be a shepherd. It was hard, lonely, dirty, and lowly work. Shepherds had no fanfare and received no accolades from the masses. But shepherds had one driving duty: to care for the sheep that were entrusted to their care. Predators could lurk and swiftly attack so shepherds had to be vigilant to be with and watch over the helpless sheep. Shepherds had to provide still, quiet waters for the sheep to drink without harm from without or conflict from within the fold. Sometimes the sheep could tangle themselves in thorn briars and the shepherd would use his staff to free them. Or even a sheep may have wandered off and as he counted his sheep, one by one, one may be missing. He would never just let it die and move on with one less sheep, but he would leave the flock protected in a spot while he would go and diligently search till he found the lost and helpless sheep. Then he would pick it up and carry it home. May ministers of the gospel tend Christ's lambs, shepherd Christ's sheep, and tend His sheep (John 21:15, 16, 17) in following the Master's steps who Himself is the *good Shepherd*!

4. Servant (John 13:15; Matt 20.28)

Our glorious Savior, on the night before He would be crucified, had the Passover meal with His disciples and he washed their feet. And on this occasion, he said that he has given an 'example' so that we also should do as He has done (John 13:15). Previously in his ministry, He told the disciples that it is the pagan leaders who lord it over their people and exercise authority over their people. But it must not be this way among Christ's people, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave! Let every minister of the gospel remember that we are not to lord authority over our people but rather we are to serve them as slaves. Indeed, whoever wishes to be first must be slave of all! No task is too lowly, no people are too dirty, no chore is too messy.

5. Farmer (1 Cor 3:5-9 & Mark 4:1-20)

In writing to a church that he loved, and yet a church laden with many problems, the Apostle Paul affirmed that he and Apollos are servants of the Lord and servants of the Corinthian believers (1 Cor 3:5). He talked about how he planted, and Apollos watered, but God causes the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything but God who causes the growth (1 Cor 3:6-8). We are simply planting seed, watering the seed and tilling the ground. Our Lord taught in a parable that a man sows the seed (which is the word of God). The seed falls on different kinds of soil -- on the road, on the rocky places, in the thorns, and on the good soil. The point? Be faithful to sow and scatter the seed of the Word faithfully and God does the heart-work in the hearer through the word which the preacher faithfully sowed. Sow the seed. Be faithful. Work hard. Don't give up. Keep tilling! Keep sowing! Keep casting the seed!

6. Mother (1 Thess 2:7-8)

Everyone has a vivid picture in their minds of a nursing mother caring for a helpless, precious little baby. The Apostle Paul employed this imagery when he told the beloved Thessalonians that they proved to be gentle among them, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children (1 Thess 2:7). Consider the heartfelt love a mother has for the baby. The baby can't reciprocate the love, vocalize gratitude, or do anything that's affectionate. And yet the mother constantly thinks of her baby, cares for her baby, nurtures her baby, feeds her baby, protects her baby, watches her baby, and gives thanks for her baby! Ministers are to have such a fond, mother-like, affection for their congregations that they are pleased to impart not only the gospel of God but even their own very lives because the people become so dear to the man of God!

7. Herald (2 Tim 4:2)

In writing to young, pastor Timothy, the Apostle Paul gives him a strict charge from God almighty and the glorious and sovereign Christ. The simple charge is clear, decisive, necessary, urgent, and mandatory: preach the Word! The verb that Paul uses employs the language of a herald that a superior commissions with a message to impart to a group of recipients. Imagine an Emperor in the ancient world who could send an ambassador with a message to a city where the Emperor was soon to visit, the ambassador would take the message from the King and deliver it *just as* he received it to the intended recipients. The herald is to stand in the public, cup his hands, lift up his voice, and boldly proclaim the King's message! It's not the herald's duty to ensure that people obey or respond accordingly. The herald simply proclaims the message that has been delivered to him by his superior. As long as he faithfully imparts the message without adding or subtracting anything to it, or making it more palatable or less offensive, he has done his job faithfully. Every minister of the gospel is a herald. We are to herald forth the King's message from the Word of God to the people that God brings to hear the truth. After all, Paul said: we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us! That's what a herald is! It is the King addressing his people *through the mouth* of the messenger, the herald, the ambassador. May God instill in us a passion to herald His Word faithfully!