

# Pastoral Visitation Article & Checklist by Dr. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr.

An encouragement to prepare before a pastor or elder visits, and a list of suggested questions for the pastor to ask.

## Preparing for Your Pastor to Visit

### THE GOD GIVEN RESPONSIBILITY TO SHEPHERD

God has given to the elders of His Church the responsibility to shepherd His flock. Paul says in Acts 20:28, "Pay attention to yourselves and to all of the flock among which the Holy Spirit has set you to be overseers to shepherd God's church, that He acquired with His own blood." Similarly, Peter wrote in 1 Peter 5:1-3, "Therefore, I urge the elders among you, as a fellow elder and witness of Christ's sufferings and as a sharer of the glory that is going to be revealed, to shepherd God's flock among you, exercising shepherdly care over it, not out of obligation but willingly, as God would have you do it; not out of eagerness to make a personal profit, but out of eagerness to serve; not lording it over those allotted to your charge, but by becoming models for the flock."

This is no small task. Church officers will give an answer to God for the discharge of their office. In fact, Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey your leaders and submit to them. They are keeping watch over your lives as men who will have to give an account. One of the principle ways this oversight is exercised is in pastoral visitation.

Yet, sad to say, pastoral visits are not always used in a manner that allows the parties involved to reap the greatest spiritual benefits. One thing you may do to increase the profit of a pastoral visit is to prepare for it. If families prepared for pastoral visits, then the time spent would be extremely more profitable. How then does one prepare?

### TAKING A SPIRITUAL INVENTORY

In the first place, use the occasion of a pastoral visit to take a spiritual inventory of your life. Examine yourself, your relationship to God and others (your family, neighbors, co-workers, the world, etc.) to determine how you are doing spiritually. Seek an answer to such questions as: How do I know for sure that I am a Christian? Am I engaged in regular Bible Study and prayer? Can I say with certainty that on a daily basis I am dying to sin, and living more righteously? What sins am I struggling with? Can I point to areas in my life where I have grown? If you have a family, then ask yourself these questions: How is my family doing spiritually? What am I doing regarding family devotions? Do I see any evidence of grace in the lives of my children? Are my children showing an increased interest in the things of the Lord? Do they like prayer, Bible reading, attending worship, and singing hymns and psalms? If you prepare in this way, then you will be able to give a substantive answer when asked about your spiritual growth. Furthermore, you will benefit spiritually from the period of self-examination.

### BEING HONEST ABOUT YOUR PROBLEMS

Out of this spiritual inventory should flow a second area of preparation. Are there any areas in your Christian experience with which you are having problems? James says in James 5:16 to confess your sins to one another. The pastoral visit is the perfect time to be honest and open about your problems. Are you having trouble with consistently studying the Bible or family devotions? Is there a particular sin that continues to get the upper hand in your life? Do not wait until the problem is insurmountable. Be prepared to share your problems and to seek counsel and prayer concerning them.

### SEEKING THE ADVICE OF YOUR ELDERS

A third area of preparation deals with the direct solicitation of advice. Be prepared to ask those visiting you if they see any problem areas in your life (or in the lives of your family members) that need to be addressed. Do not be afraid to ask these kinds of questions. We have all had spiritual blinders on at one time or another. Seeking the advice of others who have gone through similar difficulties will provide you with helpful insights to deal with your problems. In the same manner, ask your elders if there are things that you could be doing to serve the Lord. We all have promised to support the work of the church with our time, talents and treasures. Finding out where we can be of use not only blesses us, but will also give us an opportunity to be a blessing to our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

### YOUR SPIRITUAL DOCTORS ARE HERE TO SERVE YOU

When an individual goes to their doctor for a check-up, they usually give some thought how they are feeling. The individual evaluates their various aches, pains, and seeks to determine which are important and which are not. The tragedy is that sometimes a person may fail to tell the doctor about a particular symptom because they deem it unimportant, or worse, because they are afraid of what it might mean. Yet, that symptom might be the early warning system of some serious disease that could be remedied more easily in its present state. If the problem is ignored, then the disease worsens until finally measures that are more serious need to be taken, or as it happens, it is too late to act. Your elders are physicians of your soul. Their task will be a hundred times easier and more effective if you will examine yourselves and speak openly and frankly to them about your spiritual condition and needs. Remember that an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. This maxim is true for our spiritual life as well. Let us practice spiritual preventative medicine!

# Questions for Pastors & Elders to Ask

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves. 2 Cor. 13:5

## I. YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF YOURSELF

- Do you know for sure that you are a Christian?
- Are you engaged in regular Bible Study? Alternatively, are you having difficulty with consistent Bible Study and family devotions?
- How is your prayer life? Do you pray regularly?
- Can you point to areas of your life where you have grown recently?
- Are there any areas in your Christian experience in which you are having problems?
- Is there a particular temptation or sin that continues to defeat you spiritually?
- Where would you like to see yourself be spiritually in 1 year, 5 years, 10 years?

## II. YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD

- What has God been teaching you about Himself lately? Or, what Attribute of God has meant the most to you recently?
- Are there any theological truths/doctrines that you are wrestling with, confused about, or need clarification on? Have any of your theological beliefs changed?
- What Christian books have you read lately?
- Are you able to share your faith with others? If not, would you be interested in learning how to share your faith? Would you like to be discipled?

## III. YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD

- If you have a family, how is your family doing spiritually? What are you doing with respect to family devotions (Bible reading, prayer, catechism, etc.)?
- Do you see any evidence of grace in the lives of your children? Are they showing an increased interest in the things of the Lord? Do they like to pray and read the Bible? Are they baptized? Are they ready to make a profession of faith?
- How is your relationship with your Spouse? Children? Others?
- How do others see your walk as a Christian (home, neighbors, work, church, etc.)?
- How are you seeking to affect the world around you with your Christian faith?

## IV. YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE CHURCH

- What would you like to see improved at our Church?
- What do you especially like about our Church?
- What kind of advice/counsel can we provide you with at this time?