

Why Do People Come To You

I want to welcome you into the pastoral care in marriage class. Pastoral care in the last, recent years for me has started to really click and I began to realize that people come to church because they really need church. They come to God because a lot of people have tried their own resources, their own strength and their own power. And it ended up that their life became miserable. I've become recently aware that people are getting more and more teachable to the word of God but the Word of God as applied to their very practical situations and problems.

Why do people come to you if you're a pastor? Why do they come to you? And I really believe that more and more people are looking for other options. And let's talk about, like in general, some of these options. A lot of people have tried talking to a brother or a sister, or they've gone to the bar even and talked to the bartender. Or they've talked to their neighbor. And they often have explored many, many options before they talked to you, the pastor. That's sad in a lot of ways. We wish that they'd come to us first. But often they don't. And there's something inside, all of us, that sinful nature, that which keeps people not wanting to go to God first.

So when people come to you, a lot of times they've already thought through a lot of other resources, they've been online, they've talked to their friends. They've talked to their —and, yeah, even bartender. And especially when you're in a church times and situation, the person is in a flux a little bit of who they're going to talk to next, what are they going to do. And often their life becomes so miserable that they're looking for another option. People come to you because they believe prayer will change their life and they need prayer. Or they want to come to you to confess something and get prayer.

Prayer is one of those things where—and I have seen pastoral care over the years that we could talk about all sorts of ideas and principles, but at the end of the day, it just comes down to God has to change someone. And for someone to come to you for prayer is just a real privilege. Sometimes, people actually want to come to you many times. Especially within your flock, those who come regularly to your church, they come to hear God's Word.

They want to hear what does God have to say about their specific problem. Maybe they've opened the Bible up themselves, and they've looked at several passages. Maybe they have an incomplete view of the full council of God on a particular problem. So, maybe they're confused. They want to know what the Lord would have them do. So, they come to you because you're the pastor. You're the one who is studying God's Word. You're the one that's trained. You're the one who has a group of elders with you. And they want to hear what does God have to say to them about their specific problem.

Sometimes, people come to you because they just trust you. And the people around their life, they're not trusting right now. They see you. They see your family. They see your ministry. And they want to talk to your pastor. There are some families that have very positive understanding of talking to the pastor. They saw it modeled by their parents, especially multi-generational Christians who are in

your church. It occurs to them, would they have just the slightest bump. “Hey, check with the pastor a little bit.”

People also come to you because it’s the result of your ministry work, your preaching from the Bible, your preaching every week. And one of the things that you have said might dig out a bitter root, and now they want to talk based upon the sermon, they want to talk and apply further some of the application. Sometimes, maybe you’ll do a Bible study or you’ll do a seminar or you’ll do a seminar on a specific topic. And the result of you working as a pastor in that local church, it creates, sort of a culture of they want to find out more or they want to explore further some of the implications of your ministry work.

Pastoral care is, to me, one of the most exciting things about being a pastor. It’s a very practical application of 2 Timothy 4:2 to preach the word. Sometimes, we think of preach the word as that what you do on Sunday. But pastoral care is really about applying the practical truth of the Word of God. And, as the apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:2, “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.”

So why do people come to you? They come to you because they want to change something. Okay? Now, when they come to you, remember you do not listen to what their concerns are like a paid counselor. We are not counselors. People do not give us a hundred or \$200 for seeing us for one hour. You are God’s representative, so to speak. You’re a leader of hope. And as God’s representative, in a sense, they’re coming to you because sincerely, they would like to hear from God in their life.

Now, I will tell you, you are not God. Being God’s representative does not mean you have special powers, that you’re some sort of Messiah, to get a Messiah complex. What it means is that you, as a pastor and leader in God’s Word and who you are, what you’re doing is you’re seeking to bring His message, God’s message to a specific situation. So, whereas the counselor would just sort of be there to sort of, like, listen and have someone talk a little while. There’s something sacred and holy and awesome about this relationship. And understand that they’re there because you are a pastor or leader in a church. You do talk about the things of God on a regular basis. And so keep that in mind.

While you’re keeping that in mind, it really, helps you become self-aware of your person. When someone comes to you, your attitude toward them is that which is encouraging and positive. And if you’re having a bad day, to really sort of ask the Lord to keep any negativism or any things that you’re going through, just put that aside. You don’t want to throw up on them because you’re struggling while they’re coming to you for encouragement.

Now for your own self, if you’ve got serious problems, if you’re not really in the context to counsel and you cannot wear that hat, by all means, maybe reschedule. Or if you must, just be very prayerful, aware of your own person, your own walls, your own struggles for that day. You’re not going to be perfect. So, when I say be self-aware of your person, no one is perfect, there’s no Utopian view of you are God and all of those things. You’re just a human being. You’re like Moses who struggled and Aaron who struggled. And the apostle Paul who said, “When I am weak, then I am strong.” All I’m saying is be aware of your person when you’re talking to someone.

Another thing in pastoral care, it's typically very short-term. You're not going to develop a long-term counseling relationship. If someone needs clinical counseling or therapy or if there's like, for instance, a deep, rooted bitter root, maybe sexual abuse in someone's past or something like that, there are professional Christian therapists that deal strongly in those type of areas. And we want to be careful not to think that we are going to know how to do long-term clinical counseling.

Short-term is more like this, someone will come. You'll hear, listen, and we'll have a later session on listening skills. You're going to hear what they're about. And in most cases, the best pastoral care stuff, is solved in 1, 2, 3, 4 sessions. I know there are some longer ones and long-term issues, such as somebody may have an affair, and then you're bringing them wholeness. And they're coming back together. And then, once a month or for a while, you might be with them and then, once every three months. But still, it's short-term in that it's not every week and it's not something that a counselor would do.

The other thing as a leader of hope, you want to have good boundaries, excellent boundaries. Like for instance, for myself, if I meet with a woman, I make sure that it's like in the open where my assistant or other people are there. Lot of times if possible, my wife will come along and especially if we have to meet at a restaurant. I would not just meet one on one in a restaurant with a woman. And some of you might say, "Well, you're a pastor and they're a Christian. Nothing bad is going to happen." But even the look or the appearance of impropriety is something to stay away from.

Understand this that in a counseling relationship people will tell many things and you'll hear a lot of intimate details about life and who someone is. You want to keep those boundaries very good. But you're the pastor. A lot of times—and back to boundaries discussion, and we will have that in this class as well. We're going to get even further in this. But when it comes to boundaries somebody, just by revealing so much about who they are or their situation, they might feel an intimacy towards you that may put you in a difficult situation. So, as a leader of hope, you want to keep very excellent boundaries.

Lastly, as a pastor, pastors, we listen. We are very concerned about what is happening but pastors, we want to help them who come to see us. Get action plans when possible. Maybe the action plan is very simple. We're just going to pray about that. That's where it's at. Maybe the action plan, we get our white board and we write down some things that somebody might consider doing or people that they might meet. Like maybe the action plan, if it's a long-term counseling situation, the action plan might be, okay who will be a fit to encourage you in your struggles.

The bottom line, as a leader, is to be an encourager. It says in the 1 Thessalonians 5:11, "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as, in fact, you are doing." You know that last point I made was about action steps and I want to talk a little about action steps in a minute. Sometimes after you will deal with in a pastoral situation, you'll come to clear analysis of what has gone wrong or what is going wrong or some of those areas. And sometimes you can develop utopia action plans that are not going to be maintained.

What do I mean by utopia? Utopias are hard to maintain. What do we mean by that? It's like, okay, somebody comes to you and they say "Pastor, I'm really struggling with reading the Bible. Will you

encourage me in how I can get the habits of my life to read the Bible?" So, well, you can say "What would you like?" "Ah! I am just so excited about the Lord" and so they say, "Well, you know I think maybe I'll get up one hour earlier and I will read the Bible." Okay. A week later or two weeks later, you talk a little bit and the action plan was to get up an hour early to read the Bible and pray and have devotions for one hour, every morning.

Well, what happens? They fail. Okay? They fail. They do it the first day and maybe half the second day, and by the third day, they're not succeeding. So what happens is their enthusiasm for taking your advice and pastoral care there when they had a question for you, all of a sudden decreases. Now, what happened there is they almost had, I would call it, a utopia action plan. Maybe for them it was to read the Bible for five minutes every day and pray for a few minutes every day. And that would have gone a lot further in the long run. Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting and strife.

And what happens about that is in some ways the simpler they were actually succeeding in is better than this concept like, "Oh! I'm going to do this for one hour and maybe two." In marriage too. If someone comes with a "My husband and I are arguing" or "My wife and I are arguing" and then they talk about their situations about what they're dealing with. So, the action steps will be something that will be way more. I think, maybe, if you would get together here's the utopia solution. Get together every day from 8 until 9 o'clock every night and there are four children at home. And so, you try to do that. And, in that conversation, you're just going to talk about these fifteen questions that you're going to have this day. And then, they fail. They come back and they actually can't do it.

So when you think of these next steps, be very practical, very concrete, and very simple. Here's a step that I would do with any couple that comes to see me or even an individual or a family. I say, "Okay, can you read the Bible for five minutes a day four or five, six, seven times a week?" There's a little piece and that is tangible. It's doable and no matter who I talk with, in fact, I would apply this across the board. I believe God's Word will change their life. So, they actually have to open it. And a lot of times, that will be my sort of tangible little next step.

Even if I'll say "Let's pray and I don't know what to do about this, but I do know one thing. Are you reading the Bible every day?" And they say, "Well, no." "How about helping you read the Bible every day? How about reading five minutes?" At the church I serve, we even have a Bible-reading plan that I preach from in sort of a home discipleship support context. "How about if you just read the Bible and pray? And then, we'll meet again next step and go from there."

And when they meet with me, I'll even be really mindful. Did they actually do that one simple step? And if they didn't even do the one step of reading the Bible and they didn't do it at all, maybe they did it like zero in the whole week, it kind of sort of makes me know who I'm dealing with because if you won't do something that simple, that easy like open up the Bible and five minutes a day and pray, then, I sort of know if I ask them to do something hard, they probably wouldn't do it anyway because they can't even do the simple. So when you go with your action steps and look for them, try to focus on very simple little things, with I believe the foundation.

Remember we are pastors. This is a church. We're God's representative. We first want them to get connected to the Lord of Life, our Lord Jesus Christ, Father, Son, Holy Spirit through the Word of God. Again, watch the utopias. That's one of the tendencies that a lot of times, pastors will bring us. And here's the downside about utopias. If we sell a utopia solution, "Here are five things and do this," and they fail. What happens? The people who work with often get cynical on even in talking to us because "Yeah, I tried what the pastor said to do and, it was just too hard. So, I guess we're going to find other solution somewhere else."

I want to end this presentation by doing some case studies. And, that's what I'm going to do through this whole course. A lot of times when we have a presentation, I want to end with some tangible pastoral care issue that you may have in your church. And one of the pastoral care issues that if you're a pastor around people, you will ultimately at some point on a regular basis deal with gossip, gossip in the church.

Now, hypothetically, let's say, Bubba comes to you with a concern, "Pastor, Charles, I'm just not liking the way Charles is controlling things around the church like this. It's Charles' way or the highway." So, you say, "No." What do you do? Now, let's sort of talk about how you respond but I want to basically talk about a few principles that you kind of keep in mind as you're dealing with gossip or in a lot of ways any pastoral care problem in church. But, I'm just going to go with gossip.

First of all Bubba comes to you and be gentle. Because on one level, you can just say, "Bubba, I can't believe it. You're gossiping about Charles" and then you just start laying into Bubba. And then when you quote Matthew 18:15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." Okay, you can have sort of a tone with that. Okay? Or you can be gentle, "Bubba, I know that this concerns you, that you feel that Charles has done this."

But then, what you want to do is sort of get into a culture of encouragement and say, "Bubba, we want to have a place in this church where if you have an issue with Charles and it sounds like you do, how is this going to be a win for Charles and for you? Because if you talk to me or anybody else in the church, once that it starts happening, everybody's going to look at Charles and sort of have a negative view toward him, the controller Charles and what-not. But, they're also going to look at you as 'Don't tell or don't be real or don't be yourself around Bubba because Bubba may just gossip about you.'"

See? So, there's a certain you want to help them see who come to you how they're hurting the reputation, both of the person they're making the accusation to but they're also hurting their own. So, what you want to help them do is then you talk about Matthew 18. So, you know the Bible has this incredible encouragement on how to just keep a very uplifting environment in the church. And that is if you feel like Charles is being too controlling, go over to him.

Now, Bubba may respond by saying, "Well, I tried that but Charles had nothing to do with it." Well then follow that passage along where let's get Charles in here with you, and if you have a concern, about the way Charles is, then we can talk it all through together. And then you'll have, as a pastor, someone

to bring encouragement and hold, and that's number 3, is hold the people accountable to be actually doing something like Matthew 18.

Lots of times, they will say, "You know what? I'm going to do that. I'm going to go ahead to my brother and talk to him." But, the reality is they never do it. So, I, as a pastor in pastoral care, maybe a week later or 2 weeks later, "Hey, Bubba did you talk to Charles about that?" and see what happened. And what you'll find is that the whole thing was resolved and they applied Matthew 18. But there could also be where they're not applying it at all and then all of a sudden Bubba starts gossiping to other people. An you need to get, "Hey, Bubba come on in here."

Gossiping in the church is one of those subjects that because there are humans in your church, you're always going to have some struggles with it. But I would encourage, even when you're preaching, when you have the opportunity to preach or lead the Bible study, that occasionally talk about it and talk about gossip as being that which grieves God. And have that some time in your preaching where—but again, here's the thing. When you do preach on it, don't all of a sudden download someone that you just talked with with the situations that they were going through. You don't want to preach directly to a specific situation in pastoral care. Because what happens is people then will not come to you and they'll not trust you. So even in the area of gossip, that's one of those things where you want to talk about in the general. And then promote the benefit being in an encouraging community.

And the last thing, is be careful that yourself, that you don't take the bait when someone is gossiping. Like they're gossiping and then, all of a sudden you go like "You know what, Charles is controlling. You're right." "I am, Pastor?" "Yeah and you know what? He's going to ruin this church around here with his attitudes and I've noticed it too, just like you." Okay? What that does is that all of a sudden you're creating a very difficult situation within your church because now all of a sudden you're starting to take sides and there's no good end for how you're going to deal with this particular thing if you take the bait.

Instead, it's going to be like if you hear like, "Charles is really controlling" by Bubba, you can say, "You know, you feel that way and really how can we resolve it? Maybe, we need to talk to Charles." And somehow, help them do the right thing. Now, if you find that Charles is controlling, and he's bringing dissension in the church and all that, well, that might be your issue to go directly to Charles about. If you have a problem with Charles, don't gossip to someone else about it who also feels that way so you have a little pity party of gossip against Charles. No! This is your issue as pastor. If he's bringing in harm to the church, there are many passages in the Bible about dissenters and people who bring harm to the church. And that's something that you want to address to the pastor.

And, also as a pastor, if someone is really bringing harm to the church, there is the elders. When you take a matter to your elders or your leaders confidentiality, that is something to be taken seriously as well to get input because sometimes, when we read, "Go to your brother and show his fault" and everything, we can do some of those things and then it becomes more complicated. They don't listen.

So, at some point, even in Matthew 18, it talks about bringing it to the elders of the church. At some point, there may be things dealt with. But remember, have a culture of gentleness,

encouragement, holding people accountable. Do messages that talk about gossip and those types of things. But above all, do not take the bait and become a gossip yourself.

So, there's a practical situation that happens on every church and I can say more but these are some of the kernels and the things over the years that I have learned on how when people come to you, they come to you because you are God's representative. In their mind, somehow, I know you don't speak as someone who is God. God is God. But you are an agent of God's word. You come forth gently. Pastoral care can be a wonderful challenge and encouragement to you as a pastor. I'm so glad you're in this class and we're going to have a lot of fun this semester.