

Leader Resources: Pastoral Care of Teens

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PASTORAL CARE AND THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

A. Genuine Compassion

Jesus felt great pity for the crowds that came, because their problems were so great and they didn't know where to go for help. They were like sheep without a shepherd. He said to his disciples, "The harvest is so great, but the workers are so few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send out more workers for his fields." - Matthew 9:35-38

The shepherds of God's people must have compassion for their people. They see them as more than faces, or numbers in a programme. They are people with real hopes and fears, who need genuine pastoral care.

MY NOTES: _____

B. Individual Concern

"If a shepherd has one hundred sheep, and one wanders away and is lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others and go out into the hills to search for the lost one? And if he finds it, he will surely rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn't wander away! - Matthew 18:12-13

Genuine compassion must result in individual concern. Pastoral care must be comprehensive, but it can never be apportioned equally. Some will require more care than others, and at times we will need to focus on the concerns of the minority instead of the needs of the majority.

MY NOTES: _____

C. Persistent Commitment *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will leave the sheep because they aren't his and he isn't their shepherd." - John 10:11-13*

Pastoral care can be satisfying and fulfilling, but it can also be messy, tiring and frustrating - especially when dealing with adolescents! Frequently our commitment to offering pastoral care to our young people will be tested as young people look to see if we will remain committed for the long haul.

MY NOTES: _____

MY GIFTS IN PASTORAL CARE

Respond to the statements below by circling either **Yes** or **No**.

NO YES *"I accept young people as they are and provide care, not condemnation."*

NO YES *"I am a good listener."*

NO YES *"I encourage young people to think critically about their problems and brainstorm solutions rather than tell them what I think they should do."*

NO YES *"I confront sin in young people in a way that is clear but not cruel."*

NO YES *"I notice when young people are in need and I look to be part of the solution."*

NO YES *"I offer hope to people who are worried."*

NO YES *"I have compassion for people whom others may tend to avoid or dismiss."*

NO YES *"I notice when young people are overlooked or excluded from the group."*

NO YES *"I have a genuine experience of compassion toward young people."*

NO YES *"I care for the individual even at the expense of the majority's interests."*

NO YES *"I can recognize when a young person needs more help than I can provide, and work with appropriate experts to provide pastoral care."*

NOTES: _____

DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES IN PASTORAL CARE OF TEENS

Physical Development: Young people not only have external pressures to cope with – they have significant internal changes occurring, triggered by hormonal activity which marks the onset of puberty. These hormonal changes affect them in many ways, not the least of which is a preoccupation with physical appearance and a heightened sensitivity to other people’s comments.

MY NOTES: _____

Emotional Development: Adolescence is characterised by intense, changeable and confusing emotions. In providing pastoral care for the adolescent we must:

- Provide stability and objectivity to balance what might seem to us be over emotionalism. Our response will help them to achieve their own degree of stability and perspective.
- Avoid over reacting to expressions of emotion. Remember that adolescents are still learning how to express emotions in an appropriate way, and we must beware of interpreting emotions as if they were being expressed by a mature adult.
- Help them understand their emotions. Often the adolescent is as much puzzled by their emotional reaction as we are! We can give them the opportunity to verbalise their feelings and to analyse reasons for them.

MY NOTES: _____

Social Development: The two great social “tasks” of adolescence are identity development and independence. The pastoral care we provide needs to keep these two tasks in mind as follows:

- Identity: In providing pastoral care we need to remember that what you see is not always what you get! The adolescent’s perception of self is incomplete and often inaccurate. The seemingly confident, self assured teenager may in fact be plagued by self doubt and insecurity. They will be extremely sensitive to any perceived criticism and may react by either withdrawing or lashing out. Pastoral care helps the adolescent understand who they are becoming, and provides constructive feedback on which they can shape their emerging identity.
- Independence: Adolescents are no longer children, yet they are not quite adults. They want to function as independent adults but they lack the life experience and confidence to fully do so. In pastoral care we help them to take responsibility for their own decisions and actions, yet we realise that this process will be slower than it would for a mature adult.

MY NOTES: _____

Cognitive Development: The adolescent is developing their ability to think abstractly and to imagine the future consequences of present actions (formal reasoning). This affects pastoral care to them as follows:

- Abstract thought: The real significance of terms such as love, loyalty, responsibility, and faith is beginning to dawn on them. What was once a black and white world is becoming increasingly grey and more questions are being posed than are being answered. They need us to patiently help them explore the implications of these abstract concepts.
- Formal reasoning: Adolescents won’t grasp the implications of their actions as easily and in the same way as a mature adult would. They will need help to analyse the outcomes of a course of action and to explore the impact of its consequences.

MY NOTES: _____

Moral Development: The cognitive development of adolescents affects their moral development. Moral decisions become far more complex than in childhood, yet they lack an adult's breadth of experience to make wise choices. Their natural egocentricity makes it more difficult for them to appreciate how their actions might affect others. In providing pastoral care we need to help them reflect on moral issues from the standpoint beyond their own. The law of "loving others as oneself", while apparent in theory, will not always seem immediately relevant to their situation.

MY NOTES: _____

Faith Development: While faith development is in one sense, never-ending, the adolescent is perhaps undergoing a greater transition than at any other stage in life. Two characteristics that are particularly unique and which impact our pastoral care are:

- Emotionalism: The need to have some "experience" of God is an important part of the process of faith development for the adolescent. This leads to a tendency to place a greater reliance upon feelings than is warranted. In offering pastoral care we need to help the adolescent understand what many adults have already learnt: namely that feelings are not always reliable indicators of our relationship with God.
- Separation: In order for the adolescent to develop their own faith it is necessary for those brought up in a Christian home to "separate" themselves from their Christian beliefs in order to re-assess them and decide if they want to take ownership of them on into adulthood. This separation constitutes anything from genuine questioning all the way through to open rebellion. At this stage of their development pastoral care is most effective when it gives them the freedom to ask the questions and to grapple with the answers. Answers cannot be imposed they can only be offered.

MY NOTES: _____

Family Development: In providing pastoral care for an adult we may have an awareness of their role and responsibility to their wider family but essentially we are caring for an independent individual. However in the case of the adolescent, family roles and responsibilities exist in a more significant way. In understanding the young people we care for we need to develop an appreciation of the quality and dynamics of their home life. The adolescent (in particular the early and mid-adolescent) is still the responsibility of a parent. When we embark on pastoral care we do so with deference to the role of the parent in their life. We need to be clear about where we stand on issues of accountability, disclosure and the adolescent's right to privacy.

MY NOTES: _____

When I encounter a Teen whose pastoral care needs exceed my training or ability, I will refer the teen to the following local individuals or service organizations...
