

A Guide to **Shepherding Conversations**

by Justin Deeter

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”
(Acts 20:28)

The church belongs to Christ. He has purchased the flock with his own blood, and he has entrusted the elders of the church to care for them, nurture them, and protect them. Elders shepherd the heart of Christ’s flock through direct and intentional conversations. As many members have imbibed a privatized attitude to the Christian life, elders may encounter awkwardness in attempting to turn conversations towards spiritual matters. Nevertheless, the elders must persevere in the work of shepherding and create a culture among the members whereby they are grateful for the genuine and authentic shepherding, no longer seeing it as intrusive but as an act of love. Elders will engage in shepherding conversations when conducting membership interviews, checking on members with phone calls, engaging in discipleship, administering counsel, or giving correction. Learning to cultivate the skill of spiritual conversation is perhaps one of the most valuable tools for an elder.



Questions for **Shepherding**

Shepherding conversations should be 80% asking good questions and listening, with 20% instructing. Don't fill the conversation with your monologue, stifling the discussion and squandering the opportunity to understand the heart of your brother or sister. As you learn to engage in shepherding conversations, here are some examples of questions to ask. Modify them or craft your own. So the conversation doesn't feel like an interrogation, learn to weave the questions organically as the Spirit leads.

- ? What contributes most to your spiritual growth?
- ? What has God been teaching you from the preached word?
- ? How would you like to grow as a believer in the coming year?
- ? Are there some spiritual goals that I can help you work toward?
- ? What are your greatest spiritual struggles?
- ? How have your current circumstances (job, family, health, etc.) impacted your relationship with God?
- ? How is your family? What joys or concerns do you have with them?
- ? Is there any way I can personally help you in your relationship with Christ?
- ? How can the elders pray for you?
- ? Who are you sharing the gospel with in your life? How can I pray for that person and your witness?
- ? Tell me about your practice of Bible reading and prayer. What has the Lord been teaching you through the spiritual disciplines? Do you want to see some growth in any of these areas?
- ? What areas of the church are you engaged in? How has the church affected your walk as a believer? What has been helpful?

Learn to ask good open-ended follow-up questions, particularly for shallow answers. Ask questions such as, "Tell me more about that" or "Why do you think you responded that way?" or "How has that impacted you spiritually?" Good follow-up questions help you cut through the situation to the person's heart. Your questioning should shift in light of what you uncover in the conversation.

For example, if you discover a person has not consistently read the Scriptures, press further to find out why. Ask questions such as, "What has hindered your time in the Word?" Or "How can you make changes to your life to prioritize God's Word?"



Outline Template for a **Shepherding Phone Call**

While shepherding conversations can take place anywhere and at any time, the following outline gives you a template of what a discussion may look like on a shepherding phone call.

- Answer/Small Talk (30 seconds)

- Transition to Shepherding. Say, “Well, it’s good to speak with you today. I’ve been praying for your family. How has the Lord been working in your life this last month?” (30 Seconds)

- Ask Questions, listen, provide encouragement/admonishment as needed. Adjust your questioning as the Spirit leads. Inquire not only about the person you are talking to but also to their whole family, spouse and children. (5–10 Minutes as needed).

- Transition to Instruction. Say, “Thanks for sharing your heart and how the Lord is working. I’d love to share with you a Scripture that I hope will encourage your family.” (30 seconds)

- Share a short Scripture, something God has been teaching you from his Word as an encouragement. (1–3 Minutes)

- Close in Prayer (2 Minutes)

Shepherding **Souls**

Learning to shepherd members through conversation is more art than science. It requires intentionality, a sensitivity to the leading of the Spirit, and a desire to help those God has entrusted to you. However, growing in your ability to engage members in spiritual conversations will help you serve the flock faithfully until the chief shepherd appears (1 Peter 5:1–4).