



HOME RUNS

A guide to
pastoral visitation

Steven Bowers

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Steven Bowers is Pastoral Support
Worker with the Pastors' Academy
for the North of England

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1: Principles and Guidelines

There can be little doubt that the Lord and his apostles did much good through their visits to people's homes (for example Luke 10:38-42, Acts 20:20). The opportunities were used for friendship, understanding and care. Pre-eminently, it was a means of close and careful instruction and was often life changing. In looking at a variety of writing on the subject, I see very different perspectives and contrary opinions on the matter. There are diverse and opposing views even as to whether it should be done, quite apart from how it should be done!

Can we set out a clear picture and establish some principles and guidelines on how we approach the task? I believe we can. We need them because the church settings in which pastoral visitation takes place are so varied. The size of a church, the particular make-up of the congregation, the history and culture of a church, the neighbourhood in which it is located and the personalities and experience of the leadership – all these have a bearing on how the task is to be carried out.

Many pastors labour in churches and circumstances that are far from ideal and require support and direction in this as in other areas of ministry. A new pastor can often find the process daunting. The pastor of a small church faces both limitations and opportunities. Whilst I am thinking particularly of the smaller church setting, there are some things that may be useful for a pastor in a larger church to ponder.

What exactly do we mean by a 'pastoral visit'?

Beethoven wrote a 'pastoral symphony' – no, it was not a pleasing tune for pastors to listen to whilst they study! Apparently, the great man loved nature and the countryside and wrote his 6th symphony to capture something of its delights. There is, in fact, a clue here in that the 'pastoral symphony' concerns the rural setting. In particular, we are thinking of the care of sheep. It is the calling of the shepherd to be pastoral. In the agricultural setting, it is not merely a pastime with cuddly animals but it is about produce, such as wool and meat. But it is also about disease and threats. It all suggests and involves hard work.

The term pastor can be variously understood but he is, by definition, a 'people person' just as surely as a shepherd is a 'sheep person'. In caring for a flock, a shepherd may lead them as a group to some rich pasture or at times he must go

after the wandering sheep, or again tend to a single injured sheep placed alone in some specially set aside pen.

Leading, feeding, protecting, tending, caring are the things he does. The pastor preaches pastorally – to guide and feed the sheep. He prays pastorally out of care and concern for the sheep. He goes looking for the wandering sheep. He visits them at home pastorally – pursuing the work of leading, caring, feeding, protecting, 1 Peter 5:1-4.

The Lord is our Shepherd and the model for shepherds

Meditating on John 10:1-17 will take us literally into rich pasture on the subject. The Lord Jesus is the true and the good shepherd. The chapter is set against the background of stealing, killing, and destroying by false shepherds. The matter of protecting comes up immediately in the chapter and later it goes on to show that the shepherd himself was exposed to danger.

The sheep know him, trust him, recognize his voice. His aim is to guide and nourish them, to give them life abundant. He wants to enlarge his flock and he is ready to die for his flock. This is a significant theme in many parts of the Bible. It is a very poor pastor/shepherd who thinks or acts as if he is the Good Shepherd and a very foolish pastor/shepherd who cannot learn from the Good Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd, and the Great Shepherd, 1 Peter 5:4.

In his work on the “Especial Duties of Pastors and People”, John Owen captures the spirit and scope of the shepherd’s work. His words have a tenderness about them that is engaging and enriching:

“It belongs unto them, on the account of their pastoral office, to be ready, willing, and able, to comfort, relieve, and refresh, those that are tempted, tossed, wearied with fears and grounds of disconsolation, in times of trial and desertion. ‘The tongue of the learned’ is required in them, ‘that they should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.’

“One excellent qualification of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the discharge of his priestly office now in heaven, is, that he is touched with a sense of our infirmities and knows how to succour them that are tempted. His whole flock in this world are a company of tempted ones; his own life on the earth he calls ‘the time of his temptation;’ and those who have the charge of his flock under him ought to have a sense of their infirmities, and endeavour in an especial manner to succour

them that are tempted.

“But amongst them there are some always that are cast under darkness and disconsolations in a peculiar manner: some at the entrance of their conversion unto God, whilst they have a deep sense of the terror of the Lord, the sharpness of conviction, and the uncertainty of their condition; some are relapsed into sin or omissions of duties; some under great, sore, and lasting afflictions; some upon pressing, urgent, particular occasions; some on sovereign, divine desertions; some through the buffetings of Satan and the injection of blasphemous thoughts into their minds, with many other occasions of an alike nature.

“Now, the troubles, disconsolations, dejections, and fears, that arise in the minds of persons in these exercises and temptations are various, oftentimes urged and fortified with subtle arguing and fair pretences, perplexing the souls of men almost to despair and death.” (Works, 16:85–86)¹

¹ John Owen. Banner of Truth (*Works*, 16:85–86)

2: Purpose and Practice

The aims of preaching—a call to repentance and faith, giving biblical instruction, nurture in the faith and growth in the Christian life—can be very helpfully assisted by time spent with people in their homes, one to one or with couples and families. The pulpit ministry can thereby be sharpened and strengthened. The call to love can be clearly shown in pastoral interest and care as people are visited in their homes or other spheres in which they move.

Prayer, such an important part of the pastor's work, can be informed, enriched and deepened by the knowledge and understanding gained in pastoral visitation. Evangelism can be carried out in this way as it enables the pastor to deal with very specific questions, objections, obstacles people may have, in the most appropriate way for particular individuals.

Visiting and being among people is an important, indeed essential, way to get to know people well. This knowledge can deepen love and, in some cases, reveal the challenge there is to actually be loving them. They get to know the pastor and a relationship can be established and developed, John 10:3, 4, 27. This can open up pastoral opportunities for encouragement, help and instruction, even gentle rebuke or correction. It can also render people much more open and receptive to the public preaching ministry. Clearly the counsel of Paul to Timothy and Titus would require a good knowledge of the people in order to be faithfully carried out.

Doing the work

Of course, so much depends on a particular congregation itself. How many people are in the church? What are the numbers of different age groups, married and single people?

Who is very involved in the life of the church? Who is on the fringes? Some congregational analysis needs to be carried out, followed by some careful and prayerful planning.

It is good to begin with modest aims and not try and do everything at once. Slow and steady, in fact, suits this work by its very nature. As you go about these things, crises will occur and you will have to attend to those, taking them as you find them. Often a crisis presents you with something you have never faced before and will demand thought and prayer. Even when faced with something

never encountered before, lessons from other situations may well be of some advantage. We must be ready for the unexpected by expecting it!

Churches are so diverse, it is unwise to try to legislate or standardise. We need a broader framework which can be adapted to different situations. I will not single out prayer but rather say that each of the following should, of course, be approached prayerfully:

- **Know the people**

Do some congregational analysis. The membership, the fringe, more distant contacts. The general spiritual condition of those in regular attendance – as far as you can see. Note the categories, age, family circumstances, employment. Consider the mature, the gifted, the committed. Notice the range of people in 1 Thessalonians 5:14.

- **Know your resources**

Assess your own responsibilities and commitments. The particular challenges and expectations of your own pastorate. Consider who else in the church could assist you in pastoral work, even in some small way.

The Lord does not expect you to do the impossible – you can leave that to Him, 2 Corinthians 12:19.

- **Listen to and learn from others**

There are some great examples from church history ancient and modern. There is an aspect of Charles Spurgeon's ministry that is not too often mentioned. As a young pastor in London, he was faced with a cholera epidemic. Such was his diligence in visiting the sick and dying that people began to be more attuned and responsive to his preaching.

You will have other colleagues who are pastors, some of whom will have great experience. You can talk over with them how they have approached the work and what they have learned – good and bad. Some honest practical discussion at a local fraternal on the matter can be really productive.

- **Be creative**

Such are the variations from church to church that no 'one size fits all'. Every pastor is different and whilst a pastor may excel in one gift, say preaching, the other aspects of the work ought not to be neglected. This all requires a creative approach. As your knowledge of the congregation grows, as you assess your resources and as you listen to and learn from others, you can begin to work out how you can best go about your pastoral work.

Life under lockdown has forced many pastors to become creative. Some of the ideas hatched then may well have some transferrable value when restrictions are lifted - meeting for a coffee, going for a walk together etc. Do not be afraid to try different approaches. If necessity really is the mother of invention, then become inventive. Paul's life and letters bear witness to "thinking" as part of his hard work.

- **Work hard but accept limitations and imperfections**

To engage properly in pastoral visitation is to work hard, though what is hard for some will be easier for others. The ability to listen, James 1:19, to ask questions, to be patient, to be wise in the timing and the good use and application of Scripture will vary.

By all means play to your strengths, but be willing to stretch yourself and develop in those areas you feel you are weaker. Remember, there are many limits within and around every pastor. Like every church, the pastor is imperfect and a work in progress – accept that and press on.

3: Difficulties in and objections to the work

It requires time, patience, and wisdom. It will, in fact, be an opportunity for the pastor himself to develop as a man and as a preacher. It can be difficult to begin and set up meaningful relationships. We know people are all different, some are reserved and almost closed, some are open and others too open. If not planned properly, it can be very time consuming and tiring. Do not give up. If a particular visit goes badly, use it rather as reason for prayer and a readiness to learn.

Be ready to encounter many varied and difficult situations: illness, bereavement, depression, marriage difficulties, redundancy, family challenges and so on and on. There are books available that can inform you on many of these things. You will always find that there will be aspects unique to every situation – so you will need to pray constantly for wisdom, James 1:5; 2 Corinthians 2:16.

Some objections to the work

- **It is not of part of the pastor's work**

This is perhaps a more extreme and less common objection, but I fail to see it. Yes, in a large church a pastor may have to be fairly strategic in what he does, but surely, he must do it? A large church presumably will have a good-sized eldership so partnership in the work should be readily available, Acts 20:20.

- **It is time consuming/never ending**

Well, of course, it can be time consuming. But it can be time well-spent and can contribute much to the good of the flock and the growth of the under-shepherd. It is, indeed, never ending. While a man is in a pastorate, he will need to attend to this work. Although the work is never done, it can nevertheless be done, 2 Timothy 4:5.

- **It distracts from study**

The busy pastor must fight against many distractions. The very work of study itself can easily send the preacher off on some trail that he may enjoy but is not immediately relevant to the matter in hand. J.C. Ryle said that, in addition to being a student of scripture, the pastor must study the human heart. Being alongside people in their homes is an ideal place for that important pursuit. As Andrew Roycroft puts it: 'The fulfilment of being able to carry the fruits of study

into a visit, and the (anonymised) fruits of visitation into the pulpit cannot be overstated. So, visitation is part of our preparation to preach, not apart from it.²

- **It only increases expectations**

Any duty of the pastor's that is carried out well can increase expectations. That can be dealt with in different ways. Good planning and clear communication can help level expectations.

- **It will contribute to burn out**

Again, any task within the range of the pastor's duties can cause this. Good time-management in this area as in others is the key. Undoubtedly, there will be seasons when a lot of things call for attention at once. But again, it will have to be managed carefully, constructively by the sorting out of priorities and the acceptance of limitations and imperfections.

So, consider the work, and, relying on the Lord's help, go about it, noting again some wise words from Andrew Roycroft: we need to avoid 'the danger of allowing our sense that we can't do everything to make us believe we can't do anything'.³

² <https://thinkingpastorally.com/2016/08/31/15-reasons-why-visitation-is-vital-for-your-pastor/>

³ <https://thinkingpastorally.com/2018/05/02/5-deterrents-to-pastoral-visitation/>

4: It is not just the visit, it is the visitor

Perhaps you never received many visits from your pastor yourself, so you feel you have never had a model or a mentor. You have little to work on and feel largely uninformed and unschooled in the matter. Having discussed the more general picture of pastoral visitation, what would I say to my younger self if he were sat opposite me in my study? What practical help could I highlight?

What sort of a man are you?

During a visit someone said to me, “I want to know what sort of a man you are.” A friend told me of the pastor of a previous church that she had attended who would call for a visit, keep his coat on, sit on the edge of the chair, say very little and be gone fairly quickly. The way you dress, the way you carry and conduct yourself, how you listen and respond will all have a bearing on the visit. It is possible to be serious without being formal and to be cheerful without being inappropriately light. As you go about the work think about these things and be ready to be adaptable and keep learning.

We are all different personalities and some things will come easier or harder than others. The more serious and intense type may need to learn to lighten up a little, the more jovial to tone it down. Small talk can indeed at times lead us nowhere, but it can also lead, helpfully, to big talk. The person you visit has a life, so show some genuine interest in it. A man’s character is reflected in his carriage and demeanour and has the potential to help or hinder. We know what an emphasis is put on the elder/pastor’s character in scripture, 1 Timothy 3:1 - 7, 2 Timothy 2:22 - 25, Titus 1:5 - 9.

We do not need to be obsessive about it, but we do need to remember that body language speaks before and after your lips do. As Allen Ruddock writes, “Your body communicates as well as your mouth. Don’t contradict yourself.” I am reminded of Spurgeon speaking to prospective pastors, having examined and humorously dispatched virtually every type of posture, action and gesture, he announces that above all they should be themselves.⁴ He is, of course, dealing with preaching but there is something here relevant for pastoral visitation. Be your natural self, albeit with a few things helpfully pruned and tuned by ongoing experience and application. A healthy balance of godly

⁴ *Lectures To My Students*, Lecture XX, p. 355 at <https://www.monergism.com/>

earnestness coupled with some common-sense warmth and cheerfulness can go a very long way to useful visitation, Proverbs 17:22.

Look, listen, learn!

There is no doubt, you can learn more about a person by a brief visit to their home than by several discussions at the end of service. Do not misunderstand me, those after-meeting chats are often very important, but I have found that people can be very different on their own territory. As I write, one person springs to mind, at church always ultra-quiet, reserved even rather cold; at home warm, welcoming and happy to converse. This pattern persisted over many years. Once I had learned this, I felt more able to deal with “both” persons in both settings, Proverbs 27:23-27.

Whilst it is true there are many varied situations, we will find it is also true that things often recur. You learn that people tend to be on their best behaviour when the pastor calls (unless, of course, they want to take him to task on something). You can learn to recognize this tendency as you engage in the work. A few questions wisely and sensitively put can open things up or indeed shut things down. It is interesting to observe how many times the Lord used questions to alert attention, arouse interest and impart truth (see for example: Matthew 19:4, 16-17; 20:28; John 4:7-9).

The point here is that most visits can teach you things for future visits – keep your eyes and ears open, have your mental, or even literal, notebook always to hand. Cliché or not, it is true that experience is still one of the best of teachers. The book of Proverbs has considerable counsel on listening and speaking (for example, Proverbs 16:21, 24). And taking in the general instruction in the “wisdom” (godly, skilful living) that we want to receive ourselves, will also aid us in teaching and directing others, Proverbs 15:23.

Safeguards

It is a sad fact that the pastor’s work can expose him to peculiar and powerful temptations. Ignore this at your peril. The climate we live in now requires even greater vigilance. Think beforehand about the setting into which you are heading on a particular visit. Ask yourself what are the possible dangers that lurk there and what can you build in to make it more secure? A sensible degree of anticipation and preparation could go a long way to avoiding potential ruin.

Compassion and Care

“Love covers a multitude of sins”, 1 Peter 4:8. We might say also say: love can also compensate for a multitude of inadequacies. We know, or should, something of our limitations and weaknesses, but if we love people and show real care, consideration and help, it will take us a long way. Pastoral work, faithfully carried out, will bring you into many difficult situations. You will often be unsure of exactly the best steps to take but true compassion is difficult to hide and people, generally, recognize and respond to it.

Do you recall the touching scene in Acts 20:36-38 as Paul is preparing to leave Ephesus? “When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.” I have no doubt that this included their anticipation of the loss of his teaching ministry, but I think we can safely conclude that he had shown great love and concern for them and they valued and returned that love.

Help them find strength in God

Whilst the man you are is very important as we have shown, you are there above all as a fellow disciple and a servant and under-shepherd of the Lord. As you visit you cannot but bring the Lord with you. As David Short helpfully writes:

‘At a period of David’s life when he was constantly on the move, a fugitive from the murderous designs of King Saul, we are told; “Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him to find strength in God”, 1 Samuel 23:16. Undoubtedly Jonathan’s friendship in itself would have been an encouragement. As a friend he could have encouraged David by logic and argument pointing to his skill in evading capture, or by promising to do all in his power to protect him from the King. But we are told he “helped him to find strength in God”. How exactly he did this is not spelled out, but it could well have been by reminding him of God’s promise implicit in his anointing as God’s chosen king. God’s promises are utterly reliable, and the most valuable service we can render to those we visit is to help them find strength in God, by leaving with them a relevant promise or statement from God’s Word. The same applies to correspondence whether by post or email. The word of God is a seed, Luke 8:11.’⁵

5: A kaleidoscope of contexts and cases

A great part of the challenge in visiting is that there are such a variety of contexts and cases that form the core of the work. We will think about the variety of situations you will find yourself in and the types of visit that you will undertake.

Whilst it is important that the pastor does not limit himself to crisis visitation, the fact is that many crises arise in the lives of his flock. Just as in his own daily life, Jude v3,4. The cry, “who is sufficient for these things?” is true generally in ministry; it is especially so in the many and varied pastoral cases that crises can and do arise and demand urgent attention, 2 Corinthians 2:16, 3:5.

In making some comment here, I am acutely aware that there are many aspects to all of these cases and there are helpful resources available. I want to highlight some things arising from experience and observation. As you face such matters, you will inevitably need to go into more depth and will only grow by experience, Job 5:7

Visiting the sick in the Hospital Matthew 25:36

Perhaps one of the most common settings, nevertheless a special case, that requires wise handling. Try to be involved as quickly as possible without creating a sense of intrusion. Do your homework about the condition, possible outcomes and the practicalities that may be involved, not to play the doctor but to be informed, sensitive and realistic. Be in touch with the family and be alert to their needs. It is better to keep these visits reasonably short and avoid over taxing the one who is sick. Pastors are often allowed to visit outside visiting hours but should liaise with the hospital staff – they are usually helpful and appreciative. Always show them courtesy, respect and appreciation.

Visiting the sick in the home.

There is some overlap here with hospital visitation, but important differences. Be sensitive to the family situation as a whole and be considerate in setting up visits/times/duration.

There are, of course, less distractions at home than in a busy ward, so conversation and prayer will generally be easier in the home. Seek to apply scripture prayerfully and wisely. It can be helpful to ask the person in what way you can pray specifically for them. Be willing to offer or arrange practical help

from the church where it is genuinely needed. Always follow up.

Reflecting on the challenge to this work and the Lord's enabling for it, Mike Mellor writes: "It is plain to see how God has fully equipped us for this incredibly important work. We have a heavenly Father who sends us into this broken world he so loves. We have a Saviour who, by his death and resurrection, provides all we need in order to be messengers of forgiveness, comfort and hope. And we have the Holy Spirit who empowers us and provides all the compassion, strength and wisdom we need for the task. Clearly, we have no excuse **not** to go!"⁶ This valuable and eminently practical book, *I Was Sick and You Visited Me*, DayOne, will repay careful reading.

Bereavement. John 11:21, 32

This is one of the most challenging settings of all, yet so important for the pastor to "be there". I know of a pastor who, whilst taking the funeral of a church member, was approached by a non-Christian in the same family. Warmly and appreciatively, the lady said to the pastor, "you are always with us in our troubles." No doubt an encouragement to him, but also a good indication of one aspect of the value of the task.

A very basic question is, "when should I go?" I would recommend that you err on the side of immediacy. You can call as soon as you know and make it clear you are there for them but if it is not the most convenient time then leave, making it equally clear you will gladly call again as soon as it is suitable, Romans 12:15. Such a prompt visit approached in a very non-pushy way shows love and concern but it gives the person or the family the option to delay if that is what they need. To hesitate unduly can easily give the wrong impression.

Whilst thoughtful (quality reading on the subject will serve you well) you do not need to be a specialist bereavement counsellor. It is surprising what a good instructor genuine love and compassion can be.

It will be to your advantage to have passages like Psalm 90 and 103, John 11, 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 4 in your bloodstream and at your fingertips. Where the deceased is not a Christian, you will need to pray for great wisdom on how to walk carefully with both compassionate sensitivity and gospel urgency.

⁶ *I Was Sick and You Visited Me* (DayOne), p. 22

Depression Psalm 42

Make no mistake the “black dog” stalks some in your congregation. This, of course, is a particularly difficult area of pastoral ministry. It is wise to do some serious and detailed study on the matter. But remember too that in this case there is a place for the friend and not only the professional, both are necessary and valuable. Talking (if and when the person is able to) is an important part of dealing with the matter. Sometimes too there is a spiritual edge or dimension to the affliction and a caring and wise pastor can be of significant help in addition to, or even beyond, the medical professional. Those who live with a person suffering from depression themselves often need help and support, so be alert to that. A short book which offers big help in this area is: *Living with Depression* by Elaine Brown.⁷

Marriage Problems 1 Corinthians 7

Sadly, it is often the case that by the time a pastor becomes aware of a marriage in difficulty, the problem has gone some significant way along its downward, destructive path. A further problem arises in that at least one of the partners may be totally unwilling to meet and talk. You need to acquire, responsibly, what you can by way of information and background. There is a place for speaking to the parties individually and, where at all possible, together. You must be ready for the difficult and the unexpected. Be aware that there will be situations where you spend a considerable amount of time for very little apparent results. Thankfully, there will be times when a marriage is restored and that joy is worth all the efforts expended.

Ultra-careful listening and reading between the lines are skills you will need to develop. A genuine and well-established relationship with couples and families in the normal run of church life will be of great help in this matter.

Redundancy 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

This is a subject little talked about but the impact financially, personally and spiritually can be profound. Willingness to give some time to listening carefully is very important here. Scripture’s commendation of the importance and value of work, Genesis 1:27-28; Exodus 20:19; Psalm 104:23, can be a troubling pressure point for those out of work. Remember daily employment is a huge part of

⁷ *Living with Depression*. (Christian Focus)

people's lives and when things go badly wrong such is the damage that help and support are needed. The period out of work may last for quite a time, so patience and perseverance in pastoral help are important.

Being alert and aware

There is almost an endless range of possibilities where particular problems can arise and it is important to be aware that they can. For example: problems with the children, newlyweds hitting early unexpected difficulties, families facing a situation where another family member has behaved criminally or in some bizarre fashion. In the church, quite serious disputes over trivialities. Do not dwell on what might arise but do not ignore the fact that something very unusual will probably come your way at some point. Perhaps sooner than you think.

6: Social work or spiritual work?

Whilst the miscellany just cited will reflect the pastor's experience, the question naturally arises - what about the spiritual work, what about one-to-one teaching of the Word, feeding the sheep and the lambs? Thankfully, many visits will indeed *directly* involve that. Acts 20:17-38.

For example, preparing for baptism and church membership. Answering questions someone may be grappling with or correcting an important doctrinal misunderstanding. Helping new believers grow in their faith and into their life and involvement with church.

Working on the recovery of some poor saint who has fallen badly and is struggling with the realisation that they are sinners after all and yet God forgives.

Assisting a young couple who are preparing for marriage. Studying with someone who is looking for much needed biblical help on some personal crisis involving a complex ethical matter. Helping with the healing of wounds inflicted by another church member or facing a particular assault of the evil one. Giving support to a believer who is experiencing bad treatment *because* he or she is a Christian at home, work, school or college. Listening to and helping a church member who is a carer and all the challenges surrounding that. Explaining the gospel to someone who is really beginning to seek the Lord. As Derek Prime correctly and encouragingly notes, pastoral work/care can be - "the most demanding and yet the most rewarding of the pastor's duties."⁸

Thankfully, in my earliest days of pastoral visiting, I had the support of faithful elders around me who were wise and willing confidants and counsellors. It is so important for the pastor to work with his fellow elders and, if that is limited, to have the friendship, counsel and support of other pastors he knows and trusts.

Bielsa and Baxter

In the informative biography of the colourful and much talked about Argentinian football manager Marcelo Bielsa, he says he always learns more from failures than successes. Every pastor has made mistakes and this is often a step to improvement. You *will* make mistakes even if you do your best to anticipate them - ***accept and learn.***

⁸ *On Being A Pastor* (Moody Publishers), P. 150

Although it is the emotional and spiritual equivalent of going twelve rounds with Anthony Joshua, Richard Baxter's rightly famed *Reformed Pastor*, based on Acts 20:28, is invaluable reading. He is dealing with a very specific aspect of pastoral work and it is set in a particular historical culture and context, but with some adaption and modification, it is a great resource for a pastor's thinking. In part of the book's dedication, he writes of pastoral work,

"I imagined the people would scorn it, and none but a few, who had least need, would submit to it, and I thought my strength would never go through with it, having so great burdens on me before; and thus, I long delayed it, which I beseech the Lord of mercy to forgive. Whereas, upon trial, I find the difficulties almost nothing (save only through my extraordinary bodily weakness) to that which I had imagined; and I find the benefits and comforts of the work to be such, that I would not wish I had forborne it, for all the riches in the world."⁹

¹ *The Reformed Pastor* (Banner of Truth)

Appendix

Passages with a bearing on visiting

Matthew 10:11-14; 19:29; Mark 5:18-20; Luke 9:58; 10:5-7; 10:38-42; 14:1

Those in need:

Job 2:11; Matthew 25:36. See also Job 42:11; Matthew 25:39-40

The sick:

2 Kings 8:29 (2 Chr. 22:6); 2 Kings 13:14; James 5:14

The bereaved:

Genesis 37:34-35; 1 Chronicles 7:22; John 11:19, 45

Visiting individuals:

Titus 3:12; Acts 28:15; Philippians 2:25; 3 John 13-14

Visiting prisoners:

2 Timothy 1:16-17; 4:9-13; Philemon 12-13; Hebrews 13:3