

## **Take Time to Be a Shepherd**

**By Bob Young**

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Can I talk with you frankly? Especially with those who serve as spiritual leaders in our churches, in our classes, in our small groups, in our families.

The past week has turned life upside down. It hardly seems possible that just one week ago, Jan and I returned from a mission trip to the Dominican Republic and on Friday went to a grocery store that seemed normal! In the past week, I have been in contact with dozens of churches and Christians in at least ten countries. I am checking on them even as they are checking on us.

These contacts are with people I have spent a lot of time with. I have been with them, I know them, all of them know me. We have regular contact, sharing conversations, prayer, and counsel. They encourage me as I seek to encourage them. I rejoice in their fruitfulness.

As I was thinking about my global interactions during the past week, I made a short list of some foundational principles of spiritual leadership. Spiritual leaders lead effectively through active listening, mutual learning, showing respect, soul caring, shared spiritual development, planning and strategizing together, praying, and challenging one another. All of these activities require time—time spent with others, with leaders, with churches, with students, with those being mentored and coached.

Those whom I esteem as my spiritual leaders are first and foremost my friends. They spend specific time with me. They seek my presence. Not as another acquaintance, not as an elder, not as a minister fulfilling an assignment to check on me. I am grateful for my friends around the world – they care for my soul even as I care for their souls. Such friends add value to my ministry as I hope I add value to theirs.

Leadership at a worldly, institutional, official level may be possible without such friendships and soul care, but those who are genuinely committed to being under-shepherds of God's people develop deep relationships with the sheep. They know the sheep; the sheep know them. God's spiritual leaders focus both on soul cure (evangelism) and soul care (shepherding).

Such relationships develop only by investing time. In ministry, Jan and I were committed to being in the home of every member during our first year of ministry in a new location. We were committed to having personal contact with every member 2-3 times each year (we kept track!). Our ministry has changed, our focus is different, but I still write notes and have regular contact with the hundreds of Christians we serve. I still invest time in those I am seeking to bring to Jesus.

Many tasks call for our attention. If you are serious about being a shepherd, commit to spending quality and quantity time with those you lead. A good summary is this: a leader is a person with influence. Spiritual leaders constantly seek to increase their impact through soul-curing (evangelism) and soul-caring (discipleship).