

# One-Minute Shepherding

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**T**hat's ridiculous," you may say. "How can an elder be an effective shepherd in one minute?" Shepherding takes far more time than that!

We must first grapple with the reality that the average elder has a limited amount of time, certainly not enough to spend extended time with every believer in the congregation in a one-on-one situation. Even in the best of situations, where regular visitation takes place, some believers may go six months to a year without significant elder interaction. A lot can happen in that amount of time.

"One-Minute Shepherding" may help fill the gap. Author Ken Blanchard coined the phrase "One-Minute Manager" to refer to effective use of one-minute interactions with those he manages—showing interest in their goals, listening to their struggles or providing direction when they get off track. Writer John Maxwell speaks of the "30-Second Rule" of influence: during the first half-minute of meeting someone, you endeavor to "add value to them" by affirming, building up or otherwise focusing on their needs or interests. By combining these two concepts, we may discover added shepherding opportunities that require little extra time out of our busy schedules—One-Minute Shepherding. This is particularly true when implemented on a Sunday morning—since we are already with the sheep at that time!

The one-minute shepherd uses the first one minute of any conversation to focus on the "interests" or spiritual needs of each person he meets.

Obviously, one minute by itself is not sufficient as the sum total of our efforts to look after the flock. But what can be done in one minute? Here are some ideas to make use of one minute interactions:

**COMMIT WHOLEHEARTEDLY** to being a one-minute shepherd with *everyone* using the first minute of interaction with each person you meet on Sunday morning. Paul instructed that we should, "... with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do no merely look out for you own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." (Phil. 2:3b-4 NASB).

The biggest challenge to this commitment is getting over our selfish need to talk about the things that interest us! We must embrace the mind of Christ (Phil. 4:5), the attitude of sacrificing our own interests and needs for the sake of ministering to others. This is included in what Paul wrote about the challenges of ministry, "...always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body" (2 Cor. 4:10).

**ASK SINCERELY** questions that show a genuine concern for the "interests of others." How do you know what to ask? Think back to a recent prayer request he has made. Has she asked for prayer concerning witnessing to a co-worker? Is someone sick in his family? If she has children, you can be sure that is a high-interest subject. What ministry is he involved in? Even though you did not attend a specific outreach or fellowship event, you could ask those involved how it went, particularly those who provided leadership for it.

One woman, who had poured hours of planning into a ladies outreach event, said to me in confidence, "Not one elder asked me about it. I guess they are just not interested in what we are doing. That's discouraging." The one-minute shepherd could have been a huge encouragement by asking, "How did your outreach go?" A simple question shows you are interested and can be an effective way

to obey what the Holy Spirit says, “Therefore, encourage one another and build up one another ...” (1 Thess. 5:10). Asking good questions is a skill that can be learned. With practice, you can improve.

**LISTEN INTENTLY** to what is said. When you ask questions, you must be prepared to *really* listen—beyond the words being said. We must become perceptive. I used to have a bad habit when conversing with people. While the other person talked, I would be looking at other things that were going on. My wife pointed out to me that this gave the impression to people I was not really listening. I protested that I could multi-process and pay attention to more than one thing at a time. But then I started noticing when other people did the same to me. I got the point! Listening requires 100% of our attention, blocking out other things that might interest us.

When you ask, “How are you doing,” and the person responds with a listless, “Oh, all right,” an elder attuned to listening hears a need. You might respond, “You don’t sound too convincing, what’s happening that’s got you down?” Even if the person doesn’t want to open up, they will know you are a caring shepherd, and that you will be ready to listen when they are ready to share.

**COMMENT KNOWINGLY** about a ministry or action you observed in a person. For example, “Good morning, Joe. Thanks for your comments at the Lord’s Supper. That really helped me worship.” Comments like this can transform one ordinary minute into an extraordinary minute.

My favorite is what I call the *behind-the-back-compliment*. For example, “Hi, Joe. Judy mentioned to me how encouraged she was by your comments at the Lord’s supper this morning.” What this communicates to Joe is that people are talking behind his back—and saying good things about him!

Each of these comments, in your own words, will take less than one minute, but they will powerfully convey that you really care for people.

**KNOW INSIGHTFULLY** the people you shepherd. Jesus said, “I am the good Shepherd, and I know My own...” (John 10:11a). Knowing and listening go hand in hand. How can one elder know *all* the believers in his church well? If the congregation is small, you should be able to know them all at least by name and some rudimentary things about them. I have found it helpful to make notes next to my church phone list. A quick review on Sunday morning before meetings can refresh the mind about the more serious issues that people are facing. For larger churches, the elders can divide the load so that everyone is ministered to.

**PRAY APPROPRIATELY** for the genuine needs. Then you can give a one-minute encouragement, “Hi Joe, I’ve been praying for you since you gave that request last week.”

But, you don’t have to wait until Monday to pray for people. Nothing communicates that elders *really* do care for the individual believers in the congregation more than when people see the elders spontaneously taking someone aside to pray concerning some need. Sunday mornings before, between and after meetings can spawn impromptu times of bringing someone “before the throne of God.” If appropriate, you could invite some others nearby to join you.

“On the spot” praying is particularly helpful when the person specifically requests you to pray. We have all had the experience of forgetting to pray, only to be reminded the following Sunday, “Thanks for praying for me!” So spontaneous praying is a good thing!

Of course, the quality of the elders’ prayer life *between* Sundays affects their propensity to pray spontaneously *on* Sunday morning. In fact, the work of spiritual leadership involves first and foremost—prayer (Acts 6:4). I am convicted as I write. Like so many other elders, this is a constant

struggle for me. Yet, if we take our elder responsibilities seriously, we will continue to wrestle in prayer for those whom we are called to shepherd.

**LAUGH HEARTILY** with them. Being a one minute shepherd does not mean all interactions are serious. Just noticing or acknowledging people can be affirmative. Many interactions will be light and short. Sometimes a good laugh can be spiritually cathartic.

One older woman I know suffers greatly from a variety of medical conditions. For financial reasons she must hold down two low-paying jobs. Her unsaved family is unsupportive. Our fellowship helps out with financial gifts from time to time. But life for her is hard, not holding much to laugh about. I find on Sunday mornings it is relatively easy to engage her in talking about the difficulties of her life—this is no problem, because she had so many problems. But to my surprise, we started bantering back and forth in a light-hearted way. I discovered that she also needed a good laugh once in a while, to help combat the gloominess of the constant struggle with pain. Laughter is one of the human touches that can help bring people through hard times. Indeed, it is good medicine. And for this dear woman, it is a highlight of her week!

### **A Few Final Thoughts**

You may have already thought by now, “One minute can easily uncover concerns that will take far more than one minute of time.” This is true, but often, one minute will suffice. Other times, you may want to make an appointment so that you can spend more time with the individual away from the busyness of Sunday morning.

In some churches, where there is a lack of older men who are biblically qualified, the elders may be younger men who have young families. They have very real family responsibilities on Sunday morning, particularly if their wives have a heart to shepherd other women. Some couples have adopted the practice of alternating Sundays looking after the children before, between and after meetings. This frees one or the other up to do “one-minute shepherding.”

Sometimes it is tempting to have quick elders’ meetings on Sunday mornings. This of course, may be necessary from time to time, because of emergencies. However, I recommend that these should normally be avoided, so that the elders can get maximum shepherding leverage out of Sunday morning times when the whole fellowship is together.

One church has a “half-hour” rule, namely—no one cleans up or has other “meetings” during the first 30 minutes after the Sunday meetings. That way there is plenty of time for people to talk and minister to one another and to get acquainted with visitors.

### **Conclusion**

Here’s what happens when you strive to become a one-minute shepherd:

- You will be able to minister in small ways to many people on a Sunday morning.
- Your one-minute may turn into five minutes or more, or it may spawn a visit or a burden to pray more specifically.
- People will be encouraged that you spent even a short period of time focused on them as individuals.
- People will eventually come to know that you are an elder who really cares for them—and they will feel much more comfortable coming to you for spiritual counsel or questions.

- You will be emulating the Good shepherd who had a habit of engaging people one-on-one. “I [Jesus] gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you” (John 13:15).