

**(A Spiritual Leader) 7. Responsible For Others****Zac Poonen:**

A spiritual leader will keep watch over the souls in his flock, since he has to give an account to God one day for each of them (Heb.13:17).

I've told my co-workers in our churches in India that I'll be responsible for their souls, since they look up to me as their elder brother. And so I tell them what's good for them, even if it hurts them - just like I would to my own children at home. Every pastor and elder is answerable to God for the people under his charge.

God gives His children spiritual leaders just like He gives earthly fathers to children in homes. I'm the father of four sons. During the years that my boys were at home, I guided them and advised them concerning many matters. They submitted to me and obeyed me. That protected them from many dangers. Even now, after they are grown up, I still advise them now and then - because I'm their father. In the same way we are to be spiritual fathers to those whom God lays on our hearts.

God will give you a prophetic word for your flock only if you're willing to be like a father to them. You have to carry your flock on your heart before God, before He can give you an appropriate word for them. Paul had a word for each church he wrote to, because he carried them on his heart (as he says in Philippians 1:7) and prayed for them regularly. If you don't have such a care and a burden for your flock, you'll only be a professional pastor working for a salary.

What does it mean to give "an account" for people's souls? The word "account" is a financial word. If you're preparing a balance sheet and the income on the left side totals 5,000 rupees and the expenditure on the right side totals only 4,999 rupees, something is wrong. The difference may be only one rupee, but it is still a faulty statement of accounts. You have to account for that one rupee too, because accounting is a very exact science. To render account to God therefore means that you must know exactly how things are going spiritually with your flock. You have to take this matter very seriously, because spiritual leadership is a more serious task than conducting a complicated surgical operation in a hospital. Lives are at stake - for eternity.

You are responsible for the believers in your church. You can't make them spiritual. But you must do everything to bring them into a living relationship with the Lord. Your goal must be "to present every one of them perfect in Christ" (Col.1:28). You can't prevent them from backsliding, but you should have warned them before they do backslide.

Once when a young brother in our church backslid, I was distressed. I asked the Lord, why it happened and whether there had been some failure on my part - perhaps some lack of sensitivity in me to what was happening in his life. Was there a word of warning or encouragement that I should have given him? I judged myself, because I was answerable to God for that young life.

We must judge ourselves every time someone under our charge falls away. We don't have to feel condemned about it. But we must ask the Lord if He has something to tell us through it. We should not allow Satan to take us on a "guilt trip". But we must learn lessons from our mistakes for the future.

God can show us things that our human reasoning can never show us. If we are sensitive to God's voice, He will prompt us in advance to help people who are slipping up. He may one day, for no apparent reason, ask us to go and visit someone. I've had some experiences like that. Usually I've no clue as to why I have to visit the person, because God does not reveal the sins and problems of others to me. (I'm thankful for that, because I don't want to pollute my mind with the knowledge of other people's sins). The Lord prompts me then to share something with that brother. What I tell him may help him, without my even knowing what his problem was. And usually I won't even know that I've helped him.

If we have the habit of listening to God, He will arrange our circumstances such that we come in touch with people who are in need and with whom we can share the very word that will meet their need.

That was how Jesus lived (as we read in Isaiah 50:4). The Father spoke to Him every day and gave Him words to speak to the weary. That is the type of leader we should all become.

When I was in the Navy, the shift system on the ships used to be called "watches". These were four-hour shifts, during which one officer would "keep watch" and be responsible for everything that happened on the ship. If I was "on watch" at sea, from midnight to 4 in the morning, I would have to stand on the "bridge" (the top part of

the ship) with two or three sailors. All the others on the ship would be asleep. I would have to look out for other ships crossing our path and ensure that my ship was going in the right direction. I had to make course-corrections due to the drift caused by the wind and the waves. The safety of the ship and the direction the ship was going in, were all my responsibility during those 4 hours. I could not afford to sleep for even a minute during my "watch".

So when the Bible speaks about our "keeping watch" over others, this is a very serious matter. It requires alertness on the part of a spiritual leader to keep watch over people's lives, to ensure that they don't go astray, or drift away, or get lost.

Every good hospital has what they call "Daily rounds", when the doctors go around and check the condition of the patients. Those doctors don't just look out over all the wards in a general sort of way and decide that all the patients look healthy. No. They examine each patient individually.

But what do many pastors do? They just look out at all their church-members on Sunday mornings and decide that everyone appears to be doing fine spiritually.

But there are a lot of people who look very healthy on the outside who are actually very sick on the inside - both in hospitals and in churches! Some who look very healthy may be having "cancer" eating away their insides. It could be that some of those happy-looking people in your church who clap and shout "Hallelujah" may be having serious problems in their family-lives.

As a doctor checks up each patient individually, a spiritual leader must also "check up" ("keep watch over") each individual soul.

The Bible exhorts all shepherds to "know well the condition of their flocks" (Prov.27:23).

When the numbers in a church increase, the only way for a leader to continue to "keep watch" over the souls under his charge, is by delegating this responsibility to other faithful men who have been trained to do the same thing.

It is impossible for any one man to take individual care of people beyond a certain number. I personally think that number is only twelve, because that was the number that Jesus disciplined. No doctor can look after many, many hospital-wards, no matter how good a doctor he is. We all have our physical limitations.

Those who have an apostolic ministry and who have responsibility for many churches, should know the condition of the elders in all their churches. Only if the elders are spiritual will their churches be spiritual.

Unfortunately most pastors and elders are like doctors who treat patients in an "outpatient clinic", where they just write prescriptions and send the patients away, never knowing (or caring) whether their patients lived or died!

A spiritual leader however takes the responsibility of the souls under his charge very seriously.