

I've been told that I'm good at pastoral care

By [Diane Roth](#)

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I have mixed feelings about that.

I don't know why, really, especially after something I heard last month. At the Stewardship Conference I attended, one of the speakers actually admonished us, "If you don't like pastoral care, you should find another line of work."

Well, I do like pastoral care. That is, I like caring for people, visiting with people, praying with people, listening to stories. I am sometimes astonished and humbled by what people share. And, occasionally, exhausted.

But I have still have mixed feelings about claiming pastoral care as one of my strengths.

Perhaps this goes back to seminary, where I loved Greek, Hebrew, Preaching and thinking about God. I loved the academic disciplines that I was immersed in. I was a little nervous about the pastoral care and counseling class. And (here I am going to share with you a little secret) some of the Theology and Biblical studies professors were just a titch dismissive of the practical disciplines. They did make it seem as if the most important thing was knowing whether that verb was present perfect or aortic. Going to the hospital was Optional. Also, I was positive when I entered seminary that my gift was preaching. It was not pastoral care.

It's possible, though, that my prejudice goes back further than academic studies, as I encountered some pastors who were "good at pastoral care." It's also possible that my prejudice extends to my honest reflection on my present ministry, and how good it can feel to be needed by people when they are vulnerable. I have seen pastors who were "good at pastoral care" cultivate neediness in others, and create systems that were dependent on them. I don't want to be one of those pastors. But, honestly, it does feel good to be needed.

So, I have been told that I'm good at pastoral care, but I fear it, too. It can be tremendously rewarding to be the helper, be the one people turn to, be the bringer

of hope, and it can be tempting too. It can be tempting to let people lean on me too much, because it feels good to be leaned on. But good pastoral care only is occasionally about being leaned on. It is most often about helping people to stand straight and walk.

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