

Session 3 – Shepherding Sheep: Meeting the Needs of Individuals

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Synopsis: What are the day-to-day realities of Sheep-Shepherding? What skills and habits are needed for dealing with weak members, screening new members, and keeping up with all members' spiritual state? What scriptural knowledge regarding personal issues and collective practice, and practical issues, such as benevolence is needed? Common challenges of shepherding sheep are marital issues (betrayal and forgiveness), interpersonal conflicts, and struggles with addiction – topics that push elders for a deeper understanding of Biblical teaching, especially principles when the specific sin/situation is not directly addressed in scripture. It also puts elders into the uncomfortable role of being counselors and advisors for matters outside of our personal experience or comfort zone.

A. Review of the Definitions

1. Flock Shepherding – leading collective local church activities: decisions and instructions affect the whole group.
2. Sheep Shepherding – protecting and developing individual Christians by watching, teaching, warning, exhorting, comforting, advising, rebuking...

B. “Sheep Shepherding” is the preeminent duty

1. Heb 13:17 – Elders “Watch for Souls” of individuals
2. Jas 5:14-15 – Suggests elders address both spiritual (sins) and physical needs, and implies a personal relationship and “hands-on” assistance
3. I Tim 3:5 – A father “ruling his household” is analogous to an elder taking care of a church. What does this look like? – personal relationships and direction.
 - a. Earthly fathers “chasten...for our profit,” “as seems best...” (Heb 12:9)
 - b. Note that resulting holiness, and fruit of righteousness are individual benefits
4. Eph 4:11-16 – Gifts (including pastors & teachers) to produce unity of the body so that there is protection (no longer children...), maturity (grow up in all things into Him...), and enabling (equipping of saints... every part does its share) of individual members
5. I Thess 5:12 – “those who...are over you” is in the context of personal exhortations (see vs 11, 12, 14, 15)
6. Titus 1:9-11 implies that elder’s mastery of the word will enable them to stop [individual] mouths of the “idle talkers,” etc..
7. From Previous Session #1:
 - a. In the New Covenant, all intermediaries are removed – direct access to God
 - b. In the New Covenant, there are no earthly hierarchies, as in human organizations
 - c. Christians are saved or lost individually (II Cor 5:10); no soteriology for groups
 - d. Flock shepherding must be seen as supportive of Sheep Shepherding
8. Note the context of “help the weak” (Acts 20:35)

C. Role of “submission” (usually thought of as a member complying with collective decisions) as it applies more meaningfully to personal advice and direction given by elders

1. See Hebrews 13:7 – “whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct”
2. Hebrews 13:17 – “be submissive, for the watch out for your souls”
3. I Thess. 5:12 – “over you and admonish you in the Lord” (Note larger context here.)
4. Acts 20:18-19 – Paul’s example, “publicly and from house to house”
5. Note Paul’s personal work in Thessalonica (I Thess. 2:7-12): “each one of you,” vs 11.

D. The personal relationship with each sheep implied in the shepherd image

1. Ezekiel 34
 - a. Vs 11 – Search and rescue (for even one sheep, see Matt 18:12-13)
 - b. Vs 13, 28 – Bring to a place of safety (out of danger)
 - c. Vs 14 – Feed
 - d. Vs 16 – Heal wounds
2. John 10:3-4, etc. – knows sheep, calls by name, lays down his life...
3. Note the closeness to one sheep in Nathan’s parable to David (II Sam 12:3)

E. A partial sheep shepherding job description

1. [Reactionary] Address immediate problems
 - a. Address (or triage) personal crises (all sorts)
 - b. Settle squabbles between individuals
 - c. Address crises of faith & doctrine (questions/doubts)
2. [Tactical] Watch for spiritual dangers in each member, and opportunities to prevent
 - a. Know (seek to know) each member
 - b. Determine/assess background, weaknesses, liabilities, points of ignorance/error.
 - c. Assess potential (gifts, etc.), and plan development opportunities
 - d. Note and reprove poor decisions: ungodly habits, poor choice of companions, lack of growth, lack of self-discipline, & slack attendance, of course...
3. [Tactical] Provide teaching/counseling to encourage needed life changes in sheep
 - a. Investigate circumstances, reasons, & excuses
 - b. Provide warnings & advice
 - c. Describe desired behavior (paint a picture of success)
 - d. Teach & counsel for changes
 - e. Set objectives, intermediate milestones, & monitor progress
4. [Tactical] Organize spiritual support for weak members
 - a. Inform others of needs, enlist help
 - b. Arrange for personal teaching, checkups, companionship
5. [Strategic] Provide opportunities for personal growth
 - a. Assign specific public, or organizational duties
 - b. Assign teaching, care, mentoring duties
 - c. Assist and provide critique for challenging assignments
 - d. Provide training
6. Screen new members
7. Give attention to physically sick (Jas 5:14ff)
8. Initiate & lead congregational (negative) discipline processes.
9. Publicly express disapproval of an individual’s misbehavior (as teaching event)

10. Publicly express approval of praiseworthy efforts (e.g. a sound, but controversial sermon)
11. Prepare others for leadership
12. Seek & accept suggestions & criticism
13. Strive in prayer for all.

F. Practical thoughts on Flock Shepherding related to decision-making for the group

1. Weakest members are the greatest concern and source of anxiety.
2. The need for preemptive relationship building.
3. There will usually be, from those who require the most attention and care (the weakest):
 - The least sense of the scope or priorities of an elder's work
 - The least consideration of your inconvenience
 - The least gratitude for your sacrifices
 - The most questioning of your motives
 - The least opportunity for contact and awareness
4. Things that are potentially destructive within an individual, rather than being "in the way of the work," are the work.
 - Immaturity, worldliness, ignorance
 - Strife, carnality, murmuring
 - Sin and its consequences

G. Hard Questions

1. When do patience and forbearance of weakness and immaturity send the wrong message?
2. How high should the expectations be for members with disadvantages? Or... How much tolerance of immaturity (e.g. smoking, "OMG," dress, tattoos, erratic attendance, etc.) should there be and for how long?
3. What if you know that addressing spiritual weakness or error will drive someone away?
4. When does the protection or benefit of the flock override the benefit of the individual?
5. When does vocalized disagreement or disapproval become murmuring or factious behavior?
6. To what extent must one "defend the eldership" or its decisions? Why might this be necessary? Are there times and reasons not to?
7. What are effective ways of evaluating new members: determining their backgrounds (references?), abilities, quirks, personalities, problems, areas of weakness or ignorance?
8. How many of a struggling Christian's problems should be shared with others? When, why & how?
9. When should dealing with a problem member be 'delegated' to another member? With what limits?
10. When does dealing with the "squeaky wheel" or the "outlier" become bad priority setting?
11. How effective are public "comments," compared to direct conversation with those who need the comments or corrections?
12. Can preventive teaching against immature, carnal thinking/actions be perceived as personal attacks?