

“Some to be Shepherds and Teachers...” Preparing for Shepherds, 1

Recently the shepherds of Meadowlark Church of Christ began the process that will eventually result in the selection of additional shepherds and the affirmation of the shepherds that are now serving us. Several months ago the elders selected a committee to define a new process that would guide us in this process the elders have now initiated. Last Sunday, during the family meeting Don Kyle provided copies of the process to all those present and he explained the process we are now entering. A part of that process is what we will do during our sermon time today and for the next few weeks. I will be preaching about this incredibly important process and the qualities and role of elders in the church. There will be additional opportunities for discussions and teaching and questions in the near future. It is very important to realize that the selection of shepherds is one of the most important things we will do in this congregation.

This sermon is for the purpose of defining an outline that we will follow in the next few weeks as we explore what elder/shepherds are and what they do. It has been a little over a year ago that we spent 4 weeks in a series of lessons entitled *Shepherding, 101*. We will not be covering all that ground again, but I will be reminding you of many of the things we discussed at that time. I hope you will open your Bibles with me as we go through this series of lessons. I hope that you will go back online and listen to the sermons about 14 months ago on shepherding and I hope you will look over the life group lessons that we studied in January, 2005. You will also be able to listen to these sermons and read the manuscript of them each week online at our website.

I'm sure that all of us who have ever searched for employment know what the process is like. We generally get the announcement of the job opening and along with the announcement might be some basic requirements for anyone who might be successful in landing the job. It might be that one of the requirements is a high school diploma, or some specific training in the area of work that pertains to the job. There might be a requirement for years or service in that field of work and many other basic requirements. However, just because a person might be qualified for the job according to the basic requirements for the job, it does not mean that he is the one best suited for it. It is only the beginning of the process to find the person best suited for the position.

That's where we begin in the discussion of selecting shepherds in the church. We begin with the basic requirements. Paul discussed these requirements in his letter to Timothy and Titus. Next week we will spend some, if not all of our time discussing what each of these requirements means to the best of our ability, but remember this is only the beginning point and not the whole process. The basic requirements found in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-10. In general these basic requirements state that any man who would be selected a shepherd over God's people must be a godly man. He must be faithful to the Lord in all he does. He must be a good family man. He must be a good example to those both inside and outside the church. He must be mature in the way that he deals with people and he must understand the deep spiritual truths of the faith.

These are characteristics towards which every Christian should strive, as will become clear next week as we spend time discussing them. However, a man can fill all of the basic

requirements for the job of elder but not be suited for this task. In fact, the church is full of very good men who live godly lives, but not all are gifted in the area of shepherding.

From the basic requirements of a job, you then proceed to the job description. Your prospective employer will then tell you what the job will require of you and will try to determine if you have those skills and abilities to fulfill that specific job. It is the same thing when you select elders for the church. After you select those who fill the basic qualifications, it is vital then to consider the job description. Last January this is where we spent the bulk of our time. Peter clearly says to those who serve as elders to

I Peter 5:2

“Be shepherds of the God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers...”

As we said last year, we will emphasize again that the major examples of what shepherds should be is the Father and the Son. God is continually described as the shepherd of his people and Jesus is called the Good Shepherd in the New Testament. In fact, shepherding is the leading metaphor for leadership of God’s people in the Bible, being used over 500 times.

In this series of lessons we will remind ourselves of what the Bible says shepherds are what shepherds do. We will be reminded of the job description. We will be reminded that the essence of the job is spiritual and relational. Overseeing the people of God is done in the context of spirituality and in the atmosphere of relationships. Yes, elders make decisions but their decisions may be in much different areas than other leaders in the church. When selecting shepherds the church is called to consider who the spiritually mature are. Who are the men who have a good grasp of what it really means to live for the Master on a daily basis. We are called to

consider the people we tend to go to when we need spiritual guidance or good advice about living our Christian lives. Shepherds are all about sheep. We will be called to select the men who smell like sheep—men who are always there for others, who are dependable in the area of spiritual advice. These are the men we would immediately think of if our marriages were falling apart or if we were going through some spiritual crisis. These are the men who are there, encouraging and helping. There is much more to the job description and we will explore it in more detail in weeks to come.

Finally, this is not a job for everyone. Remember Paul's statement in Ephesians 4:

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Paul states it clearly. God gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, which seems to be taken together. "Pastor" is the way that our English translation translates the Greek word for shepherd. Anyone selected for this important role must be skilled at maturing others and they must be dedicated to building up the Body and helping it to grow to be like the head, Jesus Christ. It takes a servant in order to help

others to learn how to be servants and it takes someone who is continually learning to be Christ-like, in order to help others to be Christ-like also.

This is not a job for everyone because God is a part of the process and he will help us decide who he wants set apart as our shepherds. Remember those stirring words on the shore of Miletus when he told the Ephesian elders goodbye?

Acts 20:28

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God which he bought with his own blood.”

My beloved brethren, if the Holy Spirit is not involved in our selection process, we have no business doing or selecting anything. We want the men whom God has made overseers. We want his will to be done and he must be in the process or it will fail. We do not have the wisdom within us to make these incredible choices.

And this is not a job for everyone because the men who will be shepherds over us must first know that God is calling them into this and be willing to accept his call. Each man who will be asked must examine himself and discover if he truly has the gifts necessary to shepherd God's people. Each man who is called must be willing to pour out his life as a servant for the church.

Let us turn our hearts towards prayer as we approach these next few weeks and ask God to lead us to the men he has in mind to shepherd his people here. It is God's church. Jesus bought it with his blood. Let's not neglect asking him to lead us. I believe with all my heart he will.

And men, some of you will be called by this congregation and more importantly by the Lord to serve as a shepherd of his people here at Meadowlark. We hope that you will seriously and prayerfully consider this call. We need men who are willing to pour out their lives in service to the Body of Christ as shepherds of the church.