

# “Be Shepherds of the Church of God”

## The Job Description For Elders

### Preparing for Shepherds, 3

What an incredibly, thrilling time it was. Jesus had arisen from the dead and hundreds had witnessed him in his resurrection body. Forty days after his resurrection, he ascended into heaven with a thrilling promise to come again. It was only 10 days later that on the day of Pentecost that the church had its explosive beginning in the city of Jerusalem. Over 3000 were baptized on the day and the church began to glorify God in the way it was reaching out to others and by the way they were showing their love to one another.

There was a lot of tension in those early days. Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin for healing a man. They were warned not to speak again about Jesus but they refused to be intimidated and together prayed for courage to withstand the trials ahead. Early on we are told that they had all things in common and no one claimed that any of their possessions were their own but they shared everything they had (4:32ff). It was a powerful community held together by love. Many were being healed by the apostles and some of these new Christians were failing in their commitment to the Lord, most notably Ananias and Sapphira. Persecution continued and was increasing some, but so were the number of the disciples. Even though the apostles were being persecuted and were warned by the Sanhedrin they “never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ” (5:43). Persecution did not stop them and the failure of fellow believers did not stop them. They knew that God had called them to a task and they were especially gifted to perform it and they were determined to do what God had commissioned them to do.

This is seen so clearly in what follows in Acts 6. Remember how the early disciples had all things in common? Well, we find out in chapter 6 that a part of their common efforts included

taking care of the widows that were among them. Because the number of disciples were increasing some of the widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The twelve apostles gathered and they true to form did not decide to handle this problem by themselves. They gathered the disciples and said we can't neglect our job to wait on tables. It is not that waiting on tables is less important but if they were consumed by this task they would not be paying attention to the ministry of the Word and prayer. They refused to be diverted from the task that God had given them to do. You remember what they did. They asked the church to search out from among them seven men "full of the Spirit and wisdom" and we will turn the responsibility over to them. Notice what they did not say. They did not say let them bring back a plan for us to deliberate over for hours or days. They did not say you guys come up with a plan and we will implement it. They said we will turn it over to them. They trusted that brothers filled with the Spirit could do the job and they turned it over so that they could continue their work.

You might be wondering why I started here today in our discussion of the job of shepherds. I started here because one of the greatest difficulties facing shepherds of God's church today are all the things that pressure them to leave their jobs and do other things in the church that others in the church should be taking care of. We need to encourage our present shepherds and the ones we are to appoint in the next few months to stay with the job that God has given them and to not be distracted in some other direction.

But first we need to make sure we understand what that job is. Of course any description of a job can never be all-inclusive. There are things that certain jobs demand that we cannot at first understand. But there is enough in Scripture that describes the job of elders that we can define it very well. As we discussed a couple of weeks ago, the word "elder" is more like a title. It refers to the spiritual maturity of the man. And oversight is what he has been chosen by the

Lord to do, but shepherding describes how these men go about their oversight duties. In Acts 20:28, Paul clarifies the nature of the job to the elders from the city of Ephesus.

“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.”

Peter writes almost the same thing in I Peter 5:2:

“Be **shepherds** of God’s **flock** serving as overseers ... being examples to the **flock**.”

It is impossible to understand how elders are to oversee the church apart from shepherding. The two words are inseparably joined as least as they refer to the job of elders. But do we really understand what a shepherd does? The word shepherd is all over the Bible. It is used over 500 times in reference to the way leaders respond to those they are leading. It is often used of God and the way he leads us, his people. Psalm 23 is a beautiful example of this. God as shepherd provided for his people, he brings them to green pastures in which to graze and he leads them beside quiet waters. God as shepherd satisfies the needs of the flock and guides them down the right paths. He walks with them through the most difficult moments of their lives and he comforts them with his care and discipline.

Ezekiel 34 is equally informative regardless that it is set in a very negative situation. Israel’s shepherds had not taken care of God’s flock as they should have. They had selfishly looked after themselves and neglected their responsibilities. God as a result tells these shepherds through Ezekiel that he is going to take the flock away from them and take care of the sheep himself. What is so informative about this passage is that God describes what a good shepherd will do.

Ezekiel 34:15, 16

“I, myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak ... I will shepherd the flock with justice.”

It is impossible to miss the import of this description. The shepherds task centers around the well being of the sheep under his care. If they are lost he finds them; if they have strayed, he brings them back; if they are injured, he binds them up; if they are sick, he heals them; if they are weak, he strengthens them. Can you see that even though there might be demands for shepherds to do other things, if they neglect the task for which they were called, the Chief Shepherd, our heavenly Father will not be pleased and the sheep will suffer and some might even spiritually die.

When the Son came to the earth, he led as a shepherd. In John 10, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, describes how he takes care of his flock. He told his disciples that the shepherd goes out in front of the sheep to lead them and the sheep follow because they know his voice. Shepherds aren't poll takers and they are not constantly trying to find out where the sheep want them to lead them. They are in front, leading the sheep in paths of righteousness. These paths are not always popular and sometimes the shepherd might be in the minority, but his primary commitment is to the chief shepherd and he leads the sheep the way the Father desires.

He told them that the Good Shepherd is willing to lay down his life for the sheep. And that he loves them and will protect them. Again, the point is clear. Apart from being with the sheep continually, shepherds have no context for meaning.

Of course there are many specific tasks that elders perform in the church. In Titus 1, especially in view of the nature of the culture of Crete, Paul writes that elders must,

“hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”

Elders as leaders in the church are to live out their faith in such a way that others will be encouraged to imitate them (Hebrews 13:7). Elders as leaders in the church are called to keep

watch over the church as men who must give an account (Hebrews 13:17). Elders are to protect the flock from the “savage wolves who will come in among you and will not spare the flock (Acts 20:29). At the same setting he warns them about those who will arise from their own number and distort the truth and draw away disciples. They must protect the flock from them. There may be elders whose primary task is to preach and to teach, and Paul writes that they are worthy to be paid because of their work (I Timothy 5:17, 18). When sheep are sick they should call for the elders to pray for them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord (James 5:14).

Even with all these descriptions, preaching and teaching, protecting from wolves, living faithfully, refuting those who misuse the Word, praying for and anointing the sick, or acting accountably in response to the flock, none of these activities can be adequately defined apart from the concept of shepherding. One congregation when starting the process of selecting shepherds published this list.

### **What Shepherds Do**

Keep watch  
 Serve the flock  
 Take care of the flock  
 Be examples  
 Feed the flock  
 Prepare God's people for service  
 Give guidance  
 Pray over and anoint the sick  
 Preach and teach  
 Exhort  
 Admonish

### **What Shepherds Don't Do**

Boss people around  
 Think for everyone else  
 Call the shots and make  
 all the decisions  
 Legislate in matters of opinion  
 Grease the squeaky wheels  
 Manage buildings, budgets, personnel,  
 and programs

You can see that Biblically speaking shepherds are called to lead in a different ways than they sometimes historically have led.

## **My Charge to the Meadowlark Congregation**

1. **Take this responsibility very, very seriously.** Paul warns Timothy not to be hasty in the laying on of hands (I Timothy 5:22). Think carefully about the men you nominate. Is it obvious to you that God has granted them the gift of shepherding? Have they been practicing that gift in their lives? Ask yourself, “Is this a man I would go to for spiritual guidance?” “Does this man demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit in his spiritual life?” “Is this a man who could help me in my marriage and with my children?” “Is it obvious that this man loves the flock and is willing to lead the flock and lay down his life for each sheep?”

2. **Determine that when our new shepherds are selected that you will show them respect and love as they go about their tasks.** Encourage them to shepherd. Encourage them to do what the apostles did in Acts 6, and to refuse to let go of their responsibilities to do other tasks. Let’s change our expectations of our elders and expect them to shepherd the flock over which God has made them overseers. I asked Don Fike this past week what he thought I should say this morning as I talked about the job of elders in the church. He did not even pause. He said that elders must **encourage** the flock by their constant attention and their presence, and that they should

3. **Support our shepherds every day by your prayers.** Ask God to help them to fulfill the task to which God has called them. The church is filled with good men and women who are great at organization and at carrying out the other tasks that are necessary for the Body to function. We must trust that God can work through them. God has only gifted some to be pastors and teachers and if they don’t function as they should, the church will not function as it should.

**4. Be willing to answer the call of God if asked.** The Body can only function in the right way if we are all willing to use the gifts that God has given us for the glory of God. Remember Paul's exhortation, "If [your gift] is leadership, let him do it diligently." (Romans 12:8) It is time to step up and use what God has given you.

### **Just Imagine**

I have struggled for a couple of weeks trying to know exactly how to get across the point of this sermon. It could be like a family that has a sick child living there and they call for a doctor, a specialist in making people feel better. He comes when he is called and he is met at the door by one of the members of the family who says, "I know that you were called to see about the sick child but you know the house really needs painting and there is no one else to do it, would you mind doing that because if it is not done the house will fall into disrepair and will eventually be destroyed so the doctor reluctantly takes the brush and gets busy. He finishes and he meets another member of the family at the door. This member said, "I can remember that we have had doctors who were good at cleaning the house and putting things in order. I know you came to take care of the sick child but could you attend to that first? We are so tired of living in disorder and disorganization." So the doctor rolls up his sleeves and gets busy but he finds it a consuming task. He wants to get to the sick child but it seems there is never enough time. The child gets worse and worse and almost dies, but the doctor finally remembers the call. He was called to attend to the sick and not to paint or to organize. He had almost forgotten this call. He calls the members of the family together and tells them, "I am going to attend to the sick child." They look alarmed, "What about the house?" Who is going to take care of the painting and make

all the decisions about upkeep and who will keep everything organized as it should be?" The wise doctor replies, "I am sure that with God's help you will be able to take care of all this. I'm sorry, but I cannot neglect this sick child any longer. I must be true to my call and do my job or this child will die."

How many of the lost are expendable and how many of the strays will be forgotten? When will the wounds of the injured be bound up and the hungry be fed? If shepherds will not be shepherds the results are devastating to the Body of Christ.

I want to leave you with this enduring image.

Luke 15:3-7

4 "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

That, my brothers and sisters describes the heart of Shepherds. Seek men with such hearts.