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Shepherds of God's Sheep

PSALM 23:1-6

Introduction

1. All of us have dreams and goals in life:
 - a. Some are big, some are small.
 - b. Some are short term, some are long term.
2. If you are among our youth, it may be . . .
 - a. Doing well on an upcoming test or in a ball game.
 - b. Getting the job for which you applied, or into the college of your choice.
3. As we age, our goals and dreams center around our families and careers:
 - a. The safety and well-being of our loved ones.
 - b. The ability to provide for our families.
4. Toward the sunset of our lives, our goals narrow in their focus:
 - a. We want to take care of ourselves for as long as possible.
 - b. We want to finish well and know that an eternal home awaits us.
5. One of God's goals is that we might all "be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).
6. In order to facilitate this, Jesus continues to build His church.
7. Today, I would like for us to look at one aspect of His church and how He intended for it to flourish.
8. When it comes to spiritual leadership, one truth stands out on the pages of Scripture. It is the fact that . . .

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I. God Chose To Use Shepherds and Their Flocks As The Dominant

Model For Spiritual Leadership

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A. GOD AS SHEPHERD

1. All of us who grew up learning the 23rd Psalm have the first five words burned into our memories: “The Lord is my shepherd.”
2. In Isaiah 40:11, the prophet Isaiah paints a vivid picture of God’s care for His people.

“Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.”
(Isaiah 40:11, NASB95)

3. On more than one occasion in the Old Testament, God spoke of His people being “the sheep of His pasture” (Psalm 100:3; Ezekiel 34:31).
4. Even though, as Isaiah put it, “all of us like sheep have gone astray” (Isaiah 53:11), God, as the Good Shepherd came looking for us.

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B. THE PROPHETS, PRIESTS AND KINGS OF OLD TESTAMENT TIMES WERE PICTURED AS SHEPHERDS

1. In Psalm 78, Asaph tells us that God chose David to be king and to shepherd his people.

“He also chose David His servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skillful hands.” (Psalm 78:70–72, NASB95)

2. Though God expected the prophets and priests of Israel to shepherd His people, they often proved to be bad shepherds:
 - a. Through His prophet Jeremiah, God chastised these men for leading His people astray (Jeremiah 50:6).

“My people have become lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray. They have made them turn aside on the mountains; they have gone along from mountain to hill and have forgotten their resting place.”

(Jeremiah 50:6, NASB95)

- b. Through another prophet named Ezekiel, God rebuked the leaders of Israel for shirking their duties and indulged their own selfish desires (Ezekiel 34:2, 4-5).

“Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? . . . Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. “They were scattered for lack of a shepherd . . .”

(Ezekiel 34:2, 4–5, NASB95)

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C. JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

1. In the days of the prophet Ezekiel, God spoke of a time when He would send another shepherd to care for His people (Ezekiel 34:23-24).

“Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. “And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them . . .”
(Ezekiel 34:23–24, NASB95)

2. Jesus called Himself “the good shepherd” (John 10:11, 14):
 - a. “I know My own and My own know Me” (v. 14).
 - b. “I lay down My life for the sheep” (v. 15).
 - c. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (v. 27).

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D. OUR ELDERS ARE THE SHEPHERDS TO WHOM CHRIST HAS GIVEN THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CARING FOR HIS SHEEP

1. On his way back to Jerusalem, following his third missionary journey, the apostle Paul stopped at the city of Miletus and asked the elders of the church in Ephesus to meet him there.
2. Of the many things he said to the elders that day, one thing stands out as it pertains to our lesson today: “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made your overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28b, NASB95).
 - a. You and I exist here today as “the church of God” because Jesus Christ, “the good shepherd” laid down His life for us, “He purchased [us] with His own blood.”
 - b. The Holy Spirit guided us in selecting the five men who are our present elders and tasked them with our spiritual protection and nourishment.
3. In the first letter which the apostle Peter wrote to the Christians in Asia Minor, in chapter 5:1-4, he addressed the elders in those congregations and said, “shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” (1 Peter 5:2-4)
 - a. Again, as with Paul, these men are to “shepherd” us and keep watch care over us.
 - b. Notice the motivation and the method by which Peter said they are to do this:
 - 1) “not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God” — they do not shepherd us because they have been forced into the responsibility, but because they want to

- 2) “not for sordid gain, but with eagerness” — these men do not serve in this capacity out of greed for money, but because they are eager to serve
- 3) “nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock” — they do not domineer over us, but lead us by their own personal example
 - a) “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).
 - b) “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9).

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II. God’s Shepherding Model Revolves Around The Relationship Between The Shepherd And His Flock

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A. A GOOD SHEPHERD KNOWS HIS SHEEP

“I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me,” (John 10:14, NASB95)

1. He knows his sheep because he was there when they were born.
2. He may have carried the little newborn in his arms on a cold night to get it close to the fire where it could be warm.
3. He knows which ones have been injured lately and need special attention.
4. He knows the ones that are prone to wander and watches to make sure they stay with the flock.
5. He has a name for every single one and calls them by that name as he leads them out to pasture (John 10:3).
6. The truth is he smells like them because he is constantly around them.
7. Because of this, they know him and they trust him.

Slide 9**B. HIS SHEEP FOLLOW HIM BECAUSE THEY KNOW HIS VOICE**

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;” (John 10:27, NASB95)

1. Earlier, in John 10:3, Jesus said that when the doorkeeper of the sheepfold opens the door, “the sheep hear his [the shepherd’s] voice, and he calls his own by name and leads them out.”
2. A preacher once told of a friend who went to Palestine several years ago. He said that one particular afternoon he was standing on a ridge overlooking a long, narrow gorge. A single trail led down the length of the gorge to some grass-covered pasture lands. He noticed a group of shepherds walking down the trail, chatting with one another. Behind them was a long parade of sheep. When the shepherds reached the bottom where the single trail branched out into dozens of other trails, each went a different direction. As the shepherds went their different ways the large flock of sheep began dividing into smaller flocks, each sheep following its own shepherd. When the flocks were separated from each other by several hundred yards, he said that each shepherd turned and began to scan his own flock. There were some strays left behind still wandering among the rocks and brush. In turn, each shepherd called out to his sheep, first one and then another. Each of the strays, upon hearing the familiar voice of their shepherd began running to them.
3. This is what Jesus meant when He said that His sheep know His voice but “do not know the voice of strangers” (John 10:5).
4. It is because of their trust in him that the sheep will follow his voice.

Slide 10**C. A GOOD SHEPHERD WILL LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS SHEEP**

“... I lay down My life for the sheep.” (John 10:15, NASB95)

1. Shepherds in Jesus’ day were known to risk their own lives in order to protect their sheep.
2. At night, if the shepherd was out in the countryside with his sheep, he would gather them in a cave or rock-walled sheepfold and position himself

at the mouth of the cave or doorway of the sheepfold.

3. Any predator would first have to get past him in order to harm one of the flock.
4. The man named David, prior to his battle with Goliath, told of occasions when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from his father's flock (1 Samuel 17:34).
5. Each time, he went after the lion or bear, attacked him, and rescued the lamb (1 Samuel 17:35).
6. On one occasion when certain people were complaining about the people with whom Jesus spent his time, Jesus told of a man who had 100 sheep, but one was lost.
7. He left the 99 in the open pasture and went in search of the one that was lost.
8. This is what shepherds do.

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III. What Does All This Have To Do With Our Shepherds

A. OUR SHEPHERDS TRULY WANT TO KNOW EACH OF YOU

1. They love this congregation and want to see it grow again.
2. They want each of you to be strong in your faith and in your love for Christ.
3. It is for this reason they have been working with Travis Irwin.
4. It is also for this reason that they have asked you to fill out these inventories, and have asked Eric Merideth to aid them in collecting them.
5. Knowing you involves more than just knowing your name and address.
6. These inventories are just the beginning of their efforts to better know you.
7. Where are you in your life?
7. What is it that brings you great hope and joy?
8. What are your dreams as a Christian? What are your fears?
9. For who and what do they need to pray in your life?

10. What are your gifts and talents that God has given you?

11. Are you willing to use them in His service?

The questions go on and on, but I think you get the idea.

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B. OUR SHEPHERDS WANT YOU TO KNOW THEM

1. Like each of us, they are not perfect.
2. They realize that, as the apostle Paul said, they must “pay careful attention to themselves” (Acts 20:28) because of Satan’s continual schemes.
3. They covet your prayers on their behalf.
4. That being said, they want you to know their vision for this church.
5. They want you to feel comfortable coming to them and expressing your needs and concerns.

Conclusion

1. Long ago, Jesus told His disciples that He would build His church.
2. One day, as the apostle Paul said, He will present her “to Himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,” **but that** “she might be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27).
3. Jesus calls you to be a part of His church, to enjoy the blessings He longs to bestow.
4. First, you must be willing to turn from your sin and confess Him as Lord and Savior.
5. Then, allow Him to wash away your sin so that you might know the salvation He promises.