

# **FOR WANT OF A SHEPHERD**

*A Call for a Return to the Care of Souls*

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**Abstract**

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This paper examines the historical and contemporary understanding of the pastoral office. Seeking to understand the biblical background and pastoral tradition of the shepherding metaphor, the author considers numerous works related to the subject. An examination of the biblical model along with the understandings of the patristic writers presents an expansive review of available literature. The research includes authors from the biblical era through the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It is the thesis of this author that contemporary Christianity has largely abandoned the role of the pastor as the shepherd of God's flock. The goal of this work is to examine the usage and implementation of the shepherding metaphor over the centuries for an understanding of how its imagery has molded the pastoral vocation. Additionally, this work seeks to discover how culture and modern day practices have affected the pastoral office. The final chapter provides thoughts on returning to the "care of souls" as a primary motivation for pastoral ministry.

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No one can undertake the task of writing about shepherding without first being shepherded. I wish to acknowledge the many pastors, professors and friends that have taken on that role in my life over the years.

Pastors Louis Van Etter and Douglas Carey took on the formational role in my early Christian experience. Both of these men took it upon themselves to watch over and nurture my inquiry in the Christian life. It was through their ministry that I came to faith and started my life seeking after God. I can still remember our times of discussion and the ways that they cared for and taught me. Pastor Van Etter went so far as to look for ways to meet with me according to my personality and his special gifts and talents. Pastor Van Etter showed up in the hobby shop garage to help me prepare my car for a journey that would take me from his congregation. In the grease and grime, this shepherd helped me prepare for the days ahead. Pastor Harry Lewis also followed a shepherding model. He showed me that the pastor's goal was not to manage the mega-church, but to be faithful to God's command to feed and take care of the sheep. He always took time to pray with and for me and to challenge me in the ways of God.

As God has directed my path and seminary became part of my Christian experience, faithful shepherds once again came to my aid. All of my teachers and professors at Northeastern Seminary demonstrated a shepherd's heart, but Dr. Douglas Cullum stands out. In his teaching and in his advice the shepherd came through. His passion for the heart of the Shepherd made a particular impact on my life.

However, of all the people that provided me counsel and encouragement over the years it is my wife and friend Sue that helps me to honor God in all I do. She keeps me humble and calls me to a higher place. Her smile brings me joy and her ministry to children reflects the heart of a shepherd.

*P r e f a c e*

This paper is the result of my own struggle to understand what it means to be a pastor. I came to Christ at the age of twenty-four while in the United States Air Force and not long after felt that God was calling me into fulltime service. The pastor of church where I made my faith commitment made a special impact on my life. Both he and the associate pastor would spend time with me and made an effort to include my wife, who was not a Christian at the time. Their faithfulness to the shepherding task bore fruit as my wife also turned to Christ.

Just six months after my journey with Christ began the time came for my military service to end and new life decisions to be made. My pastor prayed for me something like, “Lord watch over Chris as he desires to follow your call in his life. Don’t make it too easy for him, but prepare him to serve you in ministry.” Now twenty-four years later, I find myself completing seminary and still desiring to honor God in my life and service and knowing what he desires of his shepherds.

Over the years, my career has caused me to live in numerous states where my family and I have become members of local congregations and served in any way the Lord has allowed. During those years, I have seen pastors of various styles and personalities. I had a pastor who was a great pulpiter, but spent little time with church members outside of the group setting. He was a career man, faithful to the Gospel message but always looking for his big break. Most of his congregation knew that he was hoping to become the president of the denomination. He could organize and excite and he saw many people make faith decisions every Sunday. Nevertheless, he did not know the struggles lived out among the people under his care. He knew few people by name.

Another pastor had a great heart for the lost and took time to seek out people with whom he could share the good news. This pastor was not afraid to challenge individual

members to a closer walk with Christ and he was always willing to spend some time with his congregation. Yet, another pastor seemed uncomfortable with people. A visit to a home caused him great anxiety. Five minutes into a visit and you knew he needed to escape.

Over the years, I have encountered only two or three pastors who saw pastoral care as something beyond Sunday morning preaching and obligatory hospital calls. Each of the pastors served Christ as best as they could. They were faithful in preaching God's Word and desired to see people come to salvation. However, as a person sensing God's call to the ministry and waiting for His timing, I was always watching and asking myself, "is this what God wants in a pastor?"

In the biblical image, the shepherd watched over the flock as a group and as individual sheep. He would risk his life to defend his sheep and leave the flock to rescue the lamb that strayed (Matthew 18:12). For many pastors the ministry has become an endless cycle of committee meetings and to-do lists, with little time available to attend to soul care, the ministry to individuals. Why has this happened? Are pastors responding to the culture of the day or are they being co-opted by the culture? Is the biblical shepherd model out-dated so that we are in need of a new metaphor? Is the movement away from the shepherding image a failure on the part of the modern pastorate or is it a wisely considered change? What does it mean to be a pastor in modern society? My goal is to address these issues in this thesis.

*Chapter 1*

## INTRODUCTION

A classical approach to pastoral ministry draws deeply from Scriptural metaphors. The image of the pastor as a shepherd created vivid images for the church fathers<sup>1</sup> that survived for many years. However, the move from a farming culture to a technological culture has all but reduced that image to pictures hanging on the wall.

This thesis examines the pastoral ministry as it relates to the “care of souls.” In large part, it appears that contemporary Christianity has abandoned the role of the pastor as the shepherd of God’s flock. Modern literature gives the impression that the successful pastor is one who can grow the biggest church or publish the most books. Emphasis is on a programmatic approach rather than a personal approach to reaching the lost. Likewise, current “members” are considered from the perspective of how they can be made better “ministers,” often forgetting to make them mature Christians first. “Ministers” are developed by completing a number of church electives and *viola*: the growing Christian is now supposed to be effectively reaching others. The effect seems to be an increase of informationally-based growth without formative substance. While much of the modern literature on church growth offers practical and successful methods, there seems to be a lack of attention to foundational concepts and ministry methods that honor Christ’s command to “feed and take care of my sheep.”

After careful consideration, it is my thesis that the contemporary American pastorate has abandoned the biblical vocation of a pastor as a shepherd to God’s flock. My hope is that

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<sup>1</sup> The term fathers in this sense is in no way meant to deny female influences in the early church, but uses a common designation when referring to the patristic writers. See chapter 3 of Reading the Scriptures with the Church Fathers by Christopher A. Hall, Intervarsity Press. 1998



this research will shed a bit more light on this important topic, and that with God's help my work will assist in calling the pastorate back to the image of the shepherd in which soul care is a priority of ministry.

Considerable effort is given to reviewing the biblical and traditional consensus pertaining to spiritual direction and the care of souls. Why does the Bible in general and Christ in particular focus on the metaphor of the shepherd and how does this metaphor relate to the pastoral role? If Christ is our model, why have so many abandoned his approach? Why do so many writers want to describe in detail a Jesus working with a core team (apostles) while virtually ignoring his daily movement among the people for healing, teaching and leading to a godly life? The goal of this thesis is to rediscover the heart and Spirit of the pastoral ministry, and suggest an approach for contemporary ministry that is true to both Scripture and the historical understanding of pastoral care.

*Chapter 2*

## LITERATURE REVIEW

While the whole body of literature I researched for this project gave me much to think about (see bibliography), several books in particular helped form the basis of my thesis. The Reformed Pastor by Richard Baxter<sup>2</sup> and Eugene Dolloff's, The Romance of the Doorbells<sup>3</sup> caused me to reconsider the importance of visitation in the pastoral ministry and what it really means to provide a ministry of care. Thomas Oden's various books on pastoral issues and theology (see bibliography) seemed to me to be the voice of Baxter reaching out to the modern day pastor. His insight and knowledge of the classical view of ministry made me consider carefully the biblical model.

The literature reviewed for this research falls into two distinct categories. On the one hand are works that argue that the primary goal of the pastorate is the care of souls. Included in this category are works by Adams, Baxter, Dolloff, Hansen, Oden, Peterson, Russell, Walker, Wiersbe, and Willimon and a number of doctoral dissertations. While their specific emphases vary, each these authors discuss the crucial importance of such matters as visitation, listening, soul care, catechesis, admonition and spiritual direction. The theme in each of these is that the primary pastoral function is to tend the flock that God has provided. On the other hand are authors whose primary emphasis is on program development and empowering the laity. Representative of authors in this category are Borden, Spader and Mays, Tillapaugh, and Warren. In each of these, the focus is on leadership and management.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Edinburgh, United Kingdom: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1656).

## The Pastor as Shepherd

Richard Baxter's The Reformed Pastor<sup>4</sup> is a classic text in the first category. For Baxter the shepherding metaphor was critical to a biblically-oriented pastoral ministry. Based on Scripture Baxter argued that the pastor is called to give all that he has for the sake of the flock. The structural basis for his exposition was Acts 20:28: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."<sup>5</sup> Baxter considered the state of the pastorate of his day and found it lacking. He wrote with a desire to challenge the pastors of his day to return to the vocation of the shepherd. For Baxter too many pastors were using the ministry for career and personal growth; they cared more for themselves than for their congregations. Consider Baxter's rebuke:

There are some ministers who have a hundred and fifty, two hundred or three hundred pounds per year of salary and have so large parishes, that they are not able to do a quarter of the ministerial work, nor once in a year to deal personally with half their people for their instruction, and yet they will content themselves with public preaching, as if that were all that was necessary, and leave almost the rest undone, to the everlasting danger or damnation of multitudes...<sup>6</sup>

Baxter's call was for the pastors of his day never to tire of seeking the lost, building up the weak, encouraging the strong and living the Christian life in exemplary fashion.

Many find it hard to read Baxter's words. At times, he sounds like a proponent of burnout. His emphasis on care for the flock at all costs seems almost to the point of encouraging the pastor to neglect his own family and maybe even his own life. Yet, from Baxter's perspective failure to seek and find the lost was to miss the message of the

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<sup>3</sup> Eugene Dinsmore Dolloff, *The Romance of Doorbells: A Guide to Effective Pastoral Calling* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1951).

<sup>4</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*.

<sup>5</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 51.

<sup>6</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 155.

incarnation. Since Jesus Christ left the beauty and glory of heaven to live among us for the purpose of revealing the Kingdom and providing salvation to a lost human race, dare we not sacrifice all that we have so that one more might find salvation in Christ? For Baxter, the pastor is the watchman of Ezekiel 33.<sup>7</sup>

Thomas Oden and Eugene Peterson add a modern voice to the same expectation.

Oden observes that,

Members of the congregation by tradition implicitly issued an unwritten invitation to their minister to come on behalf of their spiritual welfare whenever it is felt to be in their interest. The pastor is ordained and commissioned to do precisely that: to visit from house to house, call upon those in need, give spiritual counsel in due season.<sup>8</sup>

Peterson adds his own scathing assessment:

American pastors are abandoning their posts, left and right, and at an alarming rate. They are not leaving their churches and getting other jobs. Congregations still pay their salaries. Their names remain on the church stationery and they continue to appear in pulpits on Sundays. But they are abandoning their posts, their calling. They have gone whoring after other gods. What they do with their time under the guise of pastoral ministry hasn't the remotest connection with what the churches pastors have done for most of twenty centuries.<sup>9</sup>

There is a feeling that the modern pastorate has left its classical and biblical roots;

these authors ask that we consider how far we have strayed.

### **The Pastor as Program Leader**

In contrast, some modern writers suggest that the times require a new approach.

Borden<sup>10</sup> looks at the biblical metaphor of the shepherd and sees a misunderstood image.

Whereas the classical image of the shepherd was of a caregiver and physician, Borden suggests that the biblical shepherd “took care of the sheep, not for the sheep's benefit but

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<sup>7</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 91.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials Of Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 169.

<sup>9</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Working The Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Paul D. Borden, *Hit The Bullseye: How Denominations Can Aim Congregations at the Mission Field* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003).

for the shepherd's needs.”<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Tillapaugh sees the pastor not as a caregiver, but as a manager unleashing the church. He states, “I encourage any pastor who envisions leading an unleashed church to plan to phase out of counseling fairly early in his ministry.”<sup>12</sup>

Borden sees the pastor’s role as that of the manager and his goal is to shape the pastor into a fruitful leader of a growing congregation. Tillapaugh emphasizes the “general and special calling”<sup>13</sup> of the laity and calls attention to letting the laity find their ministry passion. Borden focuses on developing the pastor leader; Tillapaugh focuses on unleashing the laity.

Borden wants to hone the pastor into a skilled, faithful and productive leader who drives the ministry. From Borden’s perspective, a pastor’s failure to be productive in a relatively short period of time suggests that “perhaps a different calling and vocation [should be] in the pastor’s future.”<sup>14</sup>

Tillapaugh uses his experience in successful parachurch ministries to call for an empowering and unleashing of the passions of the congregation. He correctly sees the failures of some pastors to trust the members of their congregations to minister beyond their control. Tillapaugh wants to free the congregation to use the gifts of God to reach out far beyond the walls of the church building. Although Tillapaugh does not make a direct connection, he is talking about the pastoral role of “equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ...” (Ephesians 4:11-12).

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<sup>11</sup> Borden, *Hit The Bullseye: How Denominations Can Aim Congregations at the Mission Field*, 23.

<sup>12</sup> Frank R. Tillapaugh, *Unleashing The Church: Getting People Out of the Fortress and Into Ministry* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1982), 149.

<sup>13</sup> Frank R. Tillapaugh, "Unleashing Ministry Passion: A Road Less Traveled in the American Church," manuscript submitted for publication, 2004, Provided by author, 64.

<sup>14</sup> Borden, *Hit The Bullseye: How Denominations Can Aim Congregations at the Mission Field*, 153.

Likewise, Spader, Mays<sup>15</sup> and Warren<sup>16</sup> adopt a programmatic view of ministry. In fact, their models are much alike. They suggest a process by which people outside the church can “come and see” what church is all about and as a result find their faith in Christ. These authors build a model that seeks to turn unbelievers into believers, believers into disciples, and disciples into ministers in a systematic fashion.

While Spader and Mays do allude to the shepherding role, their focus is on the pastoral role of developing programs by which the church accomplishes the Great Commission. The pastor is the manager of a process, not one who directs or monitors spiritual growth. Thus Spader and Mays emphasize the necessity of well-developed program delivery systems:

You see, our programs—the way we structure our people relationships- will determine how well we are able to carry out the Great Commission. We can hope for non-Christians to be reached. We can pray for disciples to be developed. We can wish for believers to be mobilized. But for those goals to become reality we must develop delivery systems that will facilitate them. The delivery systems are generally our programs—systematically planned methods for ministering to people where they are.<sup>17</sup>

However, Spader and Mays do acknowledge the shepherding role of the pastor. Note, for example, their emphasis on the importance of human relationships in ministry; the authors’ reflection reaches for the image of a shepherd seeking the lost:

What about the people Jesus taught and spent time with? Although we have a tendency to view each episode in Jesus’ life as an independent event, an interesting pattern is evident when you look at the whole. In every circumstance Jesus’ habit was to go where the people were. Do not miss this! His emphasis on going to people, as opposed to waiting for people to come to Him, is a crucial aspect of His strategy. He was reaching out to anyone and everyone with whom He came in contact. He was trying to build relationships with as many as possible.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Dann Spader and Gary Mays, *Growing a Healthy Church* (Chicago, IL.: Moody Press, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> Spader and Mays, *Growing a Healthy Church*, 22.

<sup>18</sup> Spader and Mays, *Growing a Healthy Church*, 91.

Warren's The Purpose Driven Church<sup>19</sup> provides a more clearly defined “healthy church” model. He describes the process of developing a mission by asking what purpose God has given the church and by describing an approach to finding the answer through a directed Bible study. Using scriptural principals and contemporary business practices, Warren asks the church to define itself, its mission and its vision. From his perspective, programs and processes are established to help people move through stages of Christian maturity: from seeker to believer to disciple to minister. The process even includes covenants that the growing disciple commits to in an effort to emphasize the importance of the direction taken.

Each of these authors has provided the church with successful and practical models. Warren's Purpose Driven Church model has blessed numerous congregations and Spader and May's “healthy church” model is often used in ministry development. These models provide churches with formulae, benchmarks, support and, in some cases, turnkey methods that are easy to adapt to local needs.

With the forgoing overview of the literature as a backdrop, this study now turns to the question of the biblical background of the shepherding metaphor. What does the Bible say about the role of the pastor? What is the Jewish understanding of the shepherding metaphor based on the biblical narrative? Is the shepherding metaphor valid for today? What does God expect of his shepherds?

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<sup>19</sup> Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*.

### *Chapter 3*

#### BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

The goal of this chapter is to present the scriptural images of the shepherd. A review of some of Israel's key leaders will demonstrate both the use of the shepherding metaphor and its importance in the overall biblical message. In the Old Testament, the focus of this review will be on Moses, David and Ezekiel. Jesus and Peter are considered from the New Testament. The selection of Moses is due to his role in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and his place in history as the formational agent in Jewish law and faith. Likewise, many Christians see Moses as a forerunner of Christ and point to the numerous messianic images found in the Pentateuch. Jesus himself makes clear links between his ministry and that of Moses. David fulfills the role as the progenitor of the messianic line; in him we find the establishment of the messianic throne. Ezekiel's message provides the direct link between the shepherding metaphor and the promise of the Messiah, as well as God's rebuke toward shepherds who fail to care for the flock. Jesus' life is examined for his implicit and explicit connections to the shepherding imagery. Jesus used the metaphor to direct the establishment of the church and Jesus identified himself as the Good Shepherd. This, then, leads to the apostle Peter and his understanding and dissemination of the shepherding model.

#### **Moses: *The Shepherd Redeemer***

The biblical narrative presents Moses as one whose entire life was directed by God to accomplish the divine plan of liberating the Hebrew people from bondage. Born the son of Hebrews, Moses' life was in danger. We learn in Exodus 1:16 that Pharaoh devised a plan to reduce the population of Israel. Speaking to the Hebrew midwives he said, "When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him;



but if it is a girl, let her live.” When that plan failed, more drastic measures were implemented: Pharaoh directed his own people to drown Hebrew boys in the Nile (Exodus 1:22). Yet, even though Moses fell under this destructive edict, Pharaoh was unable to destroy Moses. Put in a pitch-covered basket and placed at the edge of the Nile among the reeds by his mother, Moses was found and adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter (Exodus 2:3-10). As a child, Moses lived a life of privilege. The scriptures recount that “Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action” (Acts 7:22). Though his life started under a cloud of fear, Moses went from being a child of Hebrew slaves to being raised in the courts of Pharaoh.

Though the Scriptures do not directly tell us what caused him to hold on to his heritage, Moses never forgot his Hebrew roots. He saw his life and position as clear evidence that God had chosen him to redeem Israel:

When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. (Acts 7:23-25)

This text suggests that Moses saw himself as the one who would deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and that he tried to accomplish it by his own strength. Yet, freedom from bondage did not come by Moses’ power and wisdom; the narrative recounts that God intended to mold Moses into the leader he desired, one not fashioned after the leadership of Egypt, but patterned after the role and function of a shepherd.

Driven from Egypt by fear of Pharaoh’s retribution, Moses traveled to Midian (Exodus 2:15). No longer in the courts of Egypt, Moses went from a life of privilege to a life of hardship, caring for the flocks of his now father-in-law Jethro. For forty years Moses tended sheep in the expanses of Midian (Acts 7:30). Privilege was not Moses’ destiny; rather, his vocation was to be one of service. Over time, Moses had a change in perspective. He no

longer saw himself as the self-appointed redeemer. Rather, Moses humbly accepted his role as a shepherd and worked hard to care for the flock under his care. Each day he would tend the sheep and make sure they had enough food. The flock did not belong to him but the responsibility did.

In light of the account in the Book of Acts (7:23-25), it seems reasonable to conclude that before his Midian experience Moses had feelings of superiority. His life as a shepherd—an occupation detested by the Egyptians (Genesis 46:34)—had a way of changing Moses’ heart. Once proud, Moses became “more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3). Apparently that was the kind of man God could use.

When Moses pastured the flock of Jethro “on the far side of the desert,” he came to “Horeb, the mountain of God” where he had what might be called a divine appointment: God called the shepherd to be the deliverer. The shepherd who guided the flock of Jethro to good pasture would now guide the people of God to the Promised Land.

Ultimately, Hebrew thought recognizes that God is the shepherd. Psalm 77:20 connects the Exodus journey with the shepherding hand of God. However, Scripture also reveals that the nation of Israel recognized Moses as the earthly shepherd used by God. “Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people—where is he who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of his flock (Isaiah 63:11)?” They were recalling God’s action, but it was Moses they remembered as the shepherd.

What qualities stand out in the image of Moses as the shepherd/redeemer? What was the difference between Moses the Egyptian redeemer and Moses the shepherd redeemer? Moses, as one called and anointed by God, cared for God’s flock with love and compassion. Throughout the Exodus journey Moses revealed God’s power. With every miraculous display

Moses called attention to God, not himself.<sup>20</sup> He led the Israelites in worship (Exodus 15). He brought the Israelites into God's presence (Exodus 19).

A reading of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy finds Moses teaching the Israelites God's decrees and plans and rebuking them when they strayed. When the Israelites forgot God's holiness and treated God with contempt, thereby becoming subject to God's wrath, Moses interceded on the people's behalf (cf. Exodus 32:30, Numbers 16:46-48 and Number 21:7).

The biblical narrative makes a clear connection between the major phases of Moses' life: from the confident leader in Pharaoh's court to his 40 years in the wilderness tending sheep, and finally, his readiness to serve as God's instrument for the deliverance of Israel. As the "son" of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses was ready to take the role of deliverer in his own hands. As a shepherd, Moses was humbled and schooled in the art of servant leadership.

### **David: *The Shepherd King***

We are introduced to David's story in 1 Samuel 16. The youngest of eight sons, David was the lowest in the family hierarchy. When the prophet Samuel was seeking the Lord's anointed among the sons of Jesse, David was an afterthought. After getting the Lord's answer that none of David's brothers were the Lord's choice, Samuel questioned Jesse: "'Are these all the sons you have?' 'There is still the youngest,' Jesse answered, 'but he is tending the sheep'" (1 Samuel 16:11). David's own father did not see the leadership potential in this son; he saw a sheep herder, rather than a prospective king. As the narrative begins, the youngest son does not even have a name. He is just the one tending the sheep. Out of sight, there was nothing to draw attention to young David.

Like so many people, Samuel tended to look at appearances and make quick judgments. When he saw Jesse's eldest son, his good looks and height, he thought "Surely

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<sup>20</sup> The only exception is found in Numbers 20:10, which denied Moses entry into the Promised Land

the Lord's anointed stands here before me" (1 Samuel 16:6). Yet, the narrative indicates that God had a different vision of leadership.<sup>21</sup> David was the leader God had chosen. Unlike Saul before him, David had a heart for God. He would not lord it over Israel; rather, he would care for them and lead them as a son cares for his father's sheep.

The Hebrew Psalter corroborates this emphasis:

He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them. (Psalm 78:70-72)

Thus, the Old Testament emphasizes that while God could have chosen anyone to fill the role of the king of Israel; he chose one shaped by the routine tasks of shepherding.

Though anointed in the presence of his brothers to be king of Israel, it would still take years before David actually sat on the throne. Like Moses before him, the biblical narrative indicates that David's preparation for leadership took place over a long period. His first assignment was to be the musician and armor bearer to the king he would eventually replace. Even in this new assignment, David remained active as a shepherd: "David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father's sheep at Bethlehem" (1 Samuel 17:15) until the time that Saul would call for David's full-time service.

One day as David left the sheep with another shepherd in order to check on his brothers and bring them provisions from their father, he witnessed the mighty Goliath challenging the Israelite army. For David, God's name was at stake. Who could allow an uncircumcised Philistine to defy the living God? David said to Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him" (1 Samuel 17:32). When

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<sup>21</sup> In Genesis 25:23 we see God going against the "tradition" of the oldest taking the first position. In God's plan, "the older will serve the younger." This concept was also used as an illustration in Romans 9:12 to discuss God's sovereignty in election.

Saul questioned David's ability to fight the seasoned Goliath, David's experience as a shepherd provided the answer:

Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine. (1 Samuel 17:34-37)

It was in this context that David saw his place as God's anointed and it gave him courage to face extreme odds. David did not trust in his own power when confronted by Goliath's might:

David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. (1 Samuel 17:45 - 46)

As a shepherd, David had to risk his life to protect the flock. Nevertheless, David understood that God was in control. Perhaps his confidence was in his knowledge that God had anointed him to replace Saul as king. Perhaps it was just the experience of the shepherd. David trusted God's promises, but he also trusted God's provision.

The twenty-third Psalm is perhaps one of the greatest examples of how David saw God's presence in his life and how he understood the task of the shepherd:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

For David it was easy to see God as a shepherd caring for His flock. In his own life, David had experienced God's care. Just as David knew how to move the flock from place to place,

God provided green pastures that offered peaceful sustenance, quiet waters that allowed for safe drinking, restoration of the soul and wisdom in traversing the paths of life.

David the shepherd would have used his rod and staff to both care for and correct his sheep. In the same way, he understood God as a shepherd who provides correction that comforts and strengthens even when surrounded by enemies. As David provided for the sheep by administering first aid and healing oils, so God provided the oil of anointing on a shepherd who would be king (1 Samuel 16:13).

Perhaps it was while David was caring for his father's sheep that he considered the nature of God as one who would provide so much and, ultimately, a permanent dwelling place with the Almighty, the Shepherd of all. That was the kind of shepherd God called David to be. As a shepherd, David learned to lead and protect. As with Moses before him, God used the shepherding role to prepare David to serve as a leader among the people of Israel.

**The Message of Ezekiel: *The promise of the shepherd***

It is important to note that at this point the investigation moves from its focus on individual biblical characters to a prophetic message. Clearly, Moses and David were individuals who influenced Jewish history. In Jewish thought, Moses is central to the receipt and dissemination of the Law and the people's deliverance from bondage. Moses represents the authority of God and he is the person to whom the Jewish people refer when questioning the rules and leadership of God. In the New Testament, the "Moses Seat" represented a position of authority (Matthew 23:2). David was the recognized king anointed by God. The Hebrew Scriptures identify David with the promise of the Messiah and reflect his connection with the imagery of a shepherd. In the case of Ezekiel, however, the person is not as important as the content of his message. Many of Ezekiel's prophecies parallel the oracles God gave to other prophets, such as the call to repentance, the coming judgment, and God's

plan for restoration. However, the biblical narrative uses Ezekiel to tie together the shepherding image in a way that few of the other prophets did.<sup>22</sup>

Ezekiel moves to the image of a shepherd in chapter thirty-four. The broad context of the chapter denounces the leaders of Israel as unfaithful to the shepherding role. Those leaders included the elders who sat with Ezekiel at his home (Ezekiel 8:1) and the rulers who ruled the nation from the time of Saul, when the people demanded a king so they could “be like all the other nations” (1 Samuel 8:20).

The image of the shepherd leader passed from Moses to Joshua (Numbers 27:15-19) and it was the image of David, the king to whom God promised the throne forever (Psalm 89:3-4). However, David’s son Solomon had a divided heart, running after the gods of his many wives (1 Kings 11:3-4); as a result, God tore the kingdom from his hands (1 Kings 11:31). For nearly 400 years the Hebrew nation was divided. Throughout the time of the divided kingdom, as Judah and Israel sought to be more like their neighbors, their rulers perverted the shepherding role. The leaders of Israel cared more for themselves than for the people under their care. From the time of Solomon, all of the kings of Israel “did evil in the eyes of the lord” (cf. 1 Kings 15:25-26, 33-34, 16:18-19) and Judah only had eight kings who “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord” (cf. 1 Kings 15:11, 22:41-43; 2 Kings 12:2, 2 Kings 14:3). God would no longer allow the Hebrews to stay in rebellion.

Leading up to chapter thirty-four, Ezekiel proclaimed God’s judgment on the people who turned from Him and followed idols. In chapter thirty-four, after a scathing rebuke of the shepherds, the prophet offered a message of accountability and hope.

The word of the LORD came to me: Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds,

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<sup>22</sup> The prophet Jeremiah also presented an oracle of God very similar to Ezekiel. In Jeremiah 23 we find a text that equally condemns the shepherds of Israel and promises restoration

clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. (Ezekiel 34:1-4)

God's judgment was clear; the shepherds of Israel were missing the mark. They no longer cared for the flock. As Moses feared in Numbers 27:17, the nation of Israel had become like sheep without a shepherd (Ezekiel 34:5). The shepherds were not living up to their responsibilities. Ezekiel's prophetic message was that God would hold the shepherds accountable for their actions and inaction. Instead of caring for the flock as God intended, the leaders of Israel cared only for themselves. The context of the failure is even more poignant—the shepherds exploited the flock. Curds were the product of the milk provided by the sheep as was the wool and the meat. The image is that of a shepherd reaping the benefits of the flock without the proper care expected of a faithful herdsman.

In Ezekiel 34:3-4 a decisive description is given of the shepherd: the shepherd is supposed to care for the flock. Care includes strengthening the weak, healing the sick, binding the wounds of the injured, bringing back strays and finding the lost. It brings to mind Jesus' reflection of the shepherd who would leave his ninety-nine sheep to find the one that was lost (Matthew 18:12-13). In contrast, the shepherds of Israel were harsh and brutal toward those under their care. Consider Solomon, son of David and heir to the throne. The Scriptures tell us that Solomon "put a heavy yoke" on the people and required "harsh labor" (1 Kings 12:4).

There seems to be play on words in the text. God is judging the shepherds, but in his denunciation God says that the shepherds ARE NOT shepherds:

You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them. Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild



animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD. (Ezekiel 34:4-9)

A shepherd is not a shepherd unless he or she is about the task of caring with the sort of specific and intentional care defined in the earlier verses. The prophet insists that the title means nothing without faithfulness to the task. When the shepherd fails to care for the flock the sheep are “harassed and helpless” (Matthew 9:36). God would no longer watch as the shepherds led the people to destruction. He would “remove them for tending the flock” and “rescue [Israel]” (Ezekiel 34:10). God is against the shepherd who uses the flock for personal profit. Just as Ezekiel was accountable for warning the people of God’s wrath and judgment (Ezekiel 3 and 33), so the shepherds of Israel were accountable for their lack of care.

Ezekiel boldly proclaims that Almighty God who took Moses and David through the school of the shepherd would judge those leaders who were not faithful to his expectations for their high vocation. Even in judgment, God would continue to serve as a faithful Shepherd genuinely caring for the flock. God would search for the lost and scattered sheep. God would provide good and rich pasture; God promised rest and healing:

For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. 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, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice. (Ezekiel 34:11-16)

Everything that the leaders of Israel failed to do, God promised to do. He would return the shepherding model to its rightful place. What humanity had corrupted God would redeem. A people living in exile received a promise of deliverance and return. It seems reasonable to suggest that in Hebrew thought the memory of the Egyptian bondage came to mind; God was promising freedom:

I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken. (Ezekiel 34:22-24)

Clearly, the actions of “members” of the flock are being addressed. In earlier verses, God indicates the differences between the sheep. Not all of the sheep will find peace:

I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet? Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away. (Ezekiel 34:17-21)

In Ezekiel’s prophetic metaphor, the sheep also bear a responsibility for their actions. The image of one sheep butting another for access to water or food is easily transferred to the selfishness of people. God not only judges the shepherd, but also the sheep. Ezekiel’s point is clear: God will intervene. Judgment is certain, yet bearable because of the promise of restoration:

I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken...Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Sovereign LORD. You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD.” (Ezekiel 34:23-24 & 30-31)

Although King David was long dead and buried, God promised Davidic leadership. God had long indicated that he would preserve the throne of David forever (cf. 2 Kings 8:19, 2 Chronicles 13:5, Psalm 89:19-37). It was the throne of David, a man after God's own heart, that God promised (see also 1 Kings 11:4; Acts 13:22), not David in the flesh. That was the angel's promise to Mary:

You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end. (Luke 1:31-33)

God reminded His people that they needed His leadership and that leadership would be in the Messianic rule of one shepherd in the line of David:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

In light of all of this, one must ask what ties it all together. It seems clear that the shepherding task was part of God's training model for leadership. Moses and David, among others, were schooled in the art of shepherding and the Scriptures make a point of connecting the shepherd of the sheep with the shepherd of the people. The message of Ezekiel brought home the judgment of God on the shepherds who failed to honor the model.

The message also promised restoration and hope. It was the hope of one shepherd who would watch over and care for one people. It was not to be a divided kingdom, as had been the case for 400 years from the end of Solomon's reign. Nor was it an exiled kingdom as God had allowed for the scattering of Israel or the Babylonia captivity of Judah. It would be a kingdom united by one shepherd that would care for all of God's people. The nations would no longer be in strife with each other. It was the promise of the Messiah.

### Jesus: *The Good Shepherd*

Therefore Jesus said again, I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- just as the Father knows me and I know the Father-- and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. (John 10:7-11, 14-16)

Over six hundred years passed from the time of Ezekiel's prophecies to the birth of Jesus. Prophets had come and gone proclaiming God's judgment and His promise. Close to 150 years before Ezekiel, Isaiah warned of God's judgment and proclaimed God's love; he too prophesied of an everlasting king from the line of David (Isaiah 11). The goal of this section is to show the unmistakable linkage between the image of the shepherd in the Old Testament and those in the New Testament, and to confirm that God established the shepherding model for the church of today.

In John 10 we see Jesus clearly taking on the title of the good shepherd. The canonical linkage between John 10 and both Ezekiel's and Isaiah's prophecies of the promised shepherd is transparent:

See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. (Isaiah 40:10-11)

I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. (Ezekiel 34:23)

Jesus' claim to be the good shepherd was not lost on the Jews. They did not take his words as a weak statement from a local rabbi; they understood the ramifications of his statements. It was not long after that the Jewish crowds pressed Jesus further:

The Jews gathered around him, saying, how long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered, I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. (John 10:24-28)

Jesus maintained not only his role as the shepherd, but he equated that role with power, authority and care. Before the altercation was over, many of the Jews would attempt to stone Jesus for blasphemy. Nevertheless, the critical question is what did Jesus teach by taking on the role of the good shepherd. Why did he think it important to link himself with the shepherding role?

First, and perhaps foremost, Jesus was taking on the role of the Messiah of God. That point is clear; numerous biblical citations underscore the understanding many Jews and Jewish leaders had about Jesus' statements (cf. Matthew 26:65, Luke 5:21, John 10:33). Surely Jesus could have presented (and sometimes did present) his messianic credentials in other ways without directly taking on the shepherd role. In John 10 Jesus also said, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture" (v. 9). He used miracles to demonstrate his authority and right to forgive sins, an authority owned by God alone (Matthew 9:6). What, then, is so important about the shepherding metaphor?

For Jesus the image of a shepherd was central to his understanding of the messianic role. Some of the followers of Jesus were expecting a messiah who would immediately break the tyranny of Rome (cf. Luke 19:11, Acts 1:6). They wanted to make Jesus their earthly king (John 6:15). Yet, in John 10 Jesus gives a counter interpretation. Rather than a military leader, Jesus understood Messiah in terms of shepherding. Unlike the shepherds of Ezekiel 34 who were not faithful to the shepherding task, Jesus claimed to be the good shepherd, one who knows the sheep and whom the sheep know. John 10:9 indicates that through Jesus the flock would find freedom and pasture. There is a clear allusion to Jeremiah 23:3 where the

unfaithful shepherds allow the flock to be scattered, but the good shepherd gathers the flock and returns them to fruitful pastures.

Jesus also makes a contrast between himself, as the good shepherd, and the hired hand. He states that the hired hand does not have a vested interest in the sheep. When trouble or danger comes, the hired hand “abandons the sheep and runs away” (John 10:12). The illustration of wolves attacking the flock while the hired hand runs away may have brought to mind the story of David defending the sheep against the lion and the bear (1 Samuel 17:34-37).

The good shepherd knows the sheep and is known by them. The good shepherd provides pasture and security for the sheep, and in the ultimate act of care, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:15). It is the act of selfless service that allows there to be “one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16). Jesus came not to be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:28). Of all the metaphors that Jesus could have used to identify himself with the messianic promise, he chose the shepherd. The image of the shepherd provides the picture of faithfulness, care, service and love.

What did Jesus do with the shepherding image beyond identifying himself with its promises of deliverance? What were Jesus’ expectations? How did Jesus communicate the shepherding image, did he only use the image in the context of the messianic role? A look at the apostle Peter is helpful in answering these questions.

**Peter: *Take care of my sheep***

Peter was one of the first people chosen to be part of Jesus’ inner circle (Matthew 4:18-20). Peter was often the one that would speak first, sometimes to his credit and sometimes to his dismay (cf. Matthew 14:22-31; 16:16 & 22-23). It was Peter who participated in certain miracles and activities of Jesus that were limited to a select few (cf. Matthew 17:1-4,

Mark 5:35-43) and it was Peter who chose to defend Jesus at the garden of Gethsemane, only to later deny him when confronted with the cross (compare John 18:10 & Mark 14:71).

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, Who do people say the Son of Man is? They replied, Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. But what about you? he asked. Who do you say I am? Simon Peter answered, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus replied, Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:13-19)

Some read the above text and see Peter identified as the head of the church Jesus established. Others see that the revelation of the Holy Spirit is the foundation on which the church is established. However, none can deny that Peter was the one who boldly acknowledged Jesus as the Christ when he considered who Jesus was. Peter was not afraid to say what was on his mind.

Certainly, Peter made mistakes and his brash personality often got him in trouble, or at least caused him discomfort or embarrassment; but Peter was a leader. Over time, Jesus would mold Peter into a leader who would boldly proclaim the Gospel and make disciples. Jesus provided a number of lessons to Peter to take him from a brash extrovert to a man with a servant's heart. One narrative in particular illustrates Jesus' intention:

So [Jesus] got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet? Jesus replied, You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand. No, said Peter, you shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered, Unless I wash you, you have no part with me. Then, Lord, Simon Peter replied, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well! Jesus answered, A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you. For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. Do you understand what I have done for you? he asked them. You call

me Teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. (John 13:4-17)

Perhaps before this experience Peter saw leadership as a role that was not subject to menial tasks. Certainly a leader would not stoop to the low position of foot washer. Jesus tried to make this point earlier in his ministry when the disciples argued over which of them would be the greatest in God's kingdom. He wanted them to understand that leadership required service not position (Mark 9:33-35). The Bible indicates that before the resurrection of Jesus the point never seemed to sink in. The disciples were lost in their own paradigm of the role of the Messiah. They expected a leader to "call down fire" against those who did not serve their needs (Luke 9:51-56).

Peter faithfully followed Jesus. He left all he had because he saw in Jesus a man that had the "words of eternal life" (John 6:68). Nevertheless, when it came time to put his life on the line, Peter fulfilled the prophecy of Jesus by denying him three times (see Luke 22:34 & 54-62). The bold leader was humbled and humiliated. The man who proclaimed Jesus as the Christ now wallowed in his own tears in recognition of his weakness. Perhaps in Peter can be seen a reflection of Moses fleeing Egypt out of fear when his own bold plan of leadership failed (Acts 7:25-29). The God who humbled Moses now humbled Peter.

As the New Testament narrative progresses we find Peter and some of the other disciples walking by the Sea of Galilee. They had already witnessed Jesus' resurrection, but they did not know what to do. It seems Peter decided that it was time to consider his old profession and he told his friends that he would go fishing. The book of John tells us that Jesus appeared at the seashore after a long night with no results for the fishermen and



beckoned them to cast their net from the boat once more. In a scene reminiscent of Matthew 5, the once empty net was now ready to break under an immense load of fish (John 21:1-6).

It was at this time that it seems the leader in Peter came back to the surface. As the others followed, Peter jumped into the water to be with the Lord. Once on the shore, they found Jesus had already prepared a fire and started a meal (John 21:7-8). After the meal, Jesus had his eyes on Peter:

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these? Yes, Lord, he said, you know that I love you. Jesus said, Feed my lambs. Again Jesus said, Simon son of John, do you truly love me? He answered, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Jesus said, Take care of my sheep. The third time he said to him, Simon son of John, do you love me? Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, Do you love me? He said, Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you. Jesus said, Feed my sheep. (John 21:15-17)

Jesus spoke to the fisherman as if to a shepherd. Of all the images that Jesus could have used to communicate effectively with this seasoned fisherman he chose the image of the shepherd. The emphasis is not the threefold reinstatement of Peter in line with his threefold denial of Christ (although that is present), but on Jesus' command that Peter go about feeding and taking care of the flock of the Good Shepherd. In imagery consistent with Ezekiel 34 Jesus defines the shepherd. He calls Peter to feed and care for all of the flock.

The message was not lost on Peter. The brash fisherman became a bold preacher (Acts 2:14-41). The one who once denied Christ now proclaimed him, even under the threat of imprisonment or death (Acts 4:21). Peter's remaining years were faithful to God's command and when the time came for Peter to pass on the mantle of leadership, he too passed along the task of the shepherd:

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to

you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. (1 Peter 5:1-4)

Peter calls his fellow elders (Πρεσβυτέρους) of the church to be shepherds. He calls them to care for God's flock, not out of compulsion, but out of love. Peter's view of leadership appears to have changed; the example of Jesus had gotten through.

Peter calls for the overseers to serve, not to be served. One can almost hear the words of Jesus, "I have set an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:15). The shepherd is to be an example of Christ for "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (1 John 2:6).

This chapter has shown that according to the biblical accounts, God chose the shepherding task to mold the key leaders of the nation of Israel. Moses was humbled and tested in the sheepfolds. David learned to trust God as he watched over his father's sheep and he transferred that trust and confidence to his role as king. Ezekiel proclaimed God's judgment on the bad shepherds and declared God's promise to one day provide the Good Shepherd. Jesus fulfilled that promise and commanded those who would serve as shepherds of his flock to honor the role. Peter, among others, passed that command on to the shepherds who would follow.

*Chapter 4*

PASTORAL TRADITION

What was the consensus of the church during the first centuries? How did the church fathers<sup>23</sup> view the role of the pastor? Did they see the shepherding metaphor as a minor element of the church's teaching? This chapter examines the classical pastoral tradition for its insights into the shepherding metaphor.

Oden makes a clear case for the classical understanding of the shepherding metaphor in scripture. Oden's references to Origen, Augustine, Tertullian, and Cyprian along with others<sup>24</sup> provide ample evidence of the ancient recognition of the importance of the shepherd metaphor. Oden finds it to be the central image in the early centuries of the church:

No image has influenced the practice of pastoral care more than its chief metaphor, the good shepherd caring for the vulnerable flock amid a perilous world. This central matrix of imagery has served as the foundation for other images of the pastor - guardian of tradition, guide through hazard, and physician of the flock. It is only on the basis of this axial metaphor that the pastor can reflect rightly upon due authorization to ministry and upon *diakonia*. It constitutes an important link in the correlation of Christ's shepherd with contemporary shepherding.<sup>25</sup>

In this section, I will by no means present an exhaustive summary of the early writings. It would be foolish to attempt to restate at length the excellent work of Oden and others, except as is sufficient to confirm that the early church writings clearly understood the correlation between Christ the Good Shepherd and those charged to care for the church in Christ's absence. I will also demonstrate that the classical understanding of the shepherding

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<sup>23</sup> See footnote 1, chapter 1, page 7

<sup>24</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Classical Pastoral Care: Volume One; Becoming a Minister* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1987), 41-53.

<sup>25</sup> Oden, *Classical Pastoral Care: Volume One; Becoming a Minister*, 41.

role in the scriptures did not stop after the patristic writers; authors from subsequent ages, including contemporary writers continued to call the pastorate back to the shepherding metaphor.

Gregory Nazianzen (AD. 328-389), also called “The Theologian,” often used the language of shepherding in his orations:

But we must really walk in the King’s highway, and take care not to turn aside from it either to the right hand or to the left, as the Proverbs say. For such is the case with our passions, and such in this matter is the task of the good shepherd, if he is to know properly the souls of his flock, and to guide them according to the methods of a pastoral care which is right and just, and worthy of our true Shepherd.<sup>26</sup>

Is mine a narrow fold? But it is unapproachable by wolves; it cannot be entered by a robber, nor climbed by thieves and strangers. I shall yet see it, I know well, wider. And many of those who are now wolves, I must reckon among my sheep, and perhaps even amongst the shepherds. This is the glad tidings brought me by the Good Shepherd, for Whose sake I lay down my life for the sheep. I fear not for the little flock; for it is seen at a glance. I know my sheep and am known of mine. Such are they that know God and are known of God. My sheep hear my voice, which I have heard from the oracles of God, which I have been taught by the Holy Fathers, which I have taught alike on all occasions, not conforming myself to the fortune, and which I will never cease to teach; in which I was born, and in which I will depart.<sup>27</sup>

One can see in Gregory’s work that the task of the pastor involves more than the preaching of the Gospel. He emphasizes knowledge of the “sheep” and pastoral care. His image is one of a shepherd guiding and watching over God’s flock. He also recognizes the importance of a pastor’s ability to teach in a way that is consistent with the commands found in 1 Timothy 3:2 and 2 Timothy 2:2. In fact, Gregory feels that he was born for teaching. No matter the size of his congregation or the financial rewards, Pastor Gregory saw himself as accountable to the owner of the flock. He dared not fail his charge.

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<sup>26</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers; Second Series, Volume 7*, 1894, translated by Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, edited by Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson), 212.

<sup>27</sup> Nazianzen, *Select Orations of Saint Gregory Nazianzen*, 333.

A review of the writings of Saint Augustine (A.D. 354-430) also finds numerous references to the shepherding imagery. Throughout his works, one will find references to Christ as the Shepherd of the church and the Good Shepherd over one flock. Moreover, Augustine makes a direct linkage to Ezekiel 34:

Moreover, as there are good shepherds and bad shepherds, so also in flocks there are good and bad. The good are represented by the name of sheep, but the bad are called goats: they feed, nevertheless, side by side in the same pastures, until the Chief Shepherd, who is called the One Shepherd, shall come and separate them one from another according to His promise, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats. On us He has laid the duty of gathering the flock; to Himself He has reserved the work of final separation, because it pertains properly to Him who cannot err. For those presumptuous servants, who have lightly ventured to separate before the time which the Lord has reserved in His own hand, have, instead of separating others, only been separated themselves from Catholic unity; for how could those have a clean flock who have by schism become unclean?<sup>28</sup>

Although most of his references are to Jesus Christ as the Chief Shepherd promised by God, Augustine clearly refers to the pastoral role of “gathering the flock.” There is also seems to be an allusion to pastoral care in that Augustine cautions “shepherds” not to presume upon themselves the ability to separate the sheep from the goats.

It seems that Augustine wants to keep the flock together so that by their unity with the rest of the flock, salvation may find its way into their hearts. This understanding appears valid considering Augustine’s statement:

If a bad will ought always to be left to its own freedom, why are negligent pastors reproved? and why is it said to them, Ye have not brought back the wandering sheep, ye have not sought the perishing? You also are sheep belonging to Christ, you bear the Lord’s mark in the sacrament which you have received, but you are wandering and perishing. Let us not, therefore, incur your displeasure because we bring back the wandering; and seek the perishing; for it is better for us to obey the will of the Lord, who charges us to compel you to return to His fold, than to yield consent to the will of the wandering sheep, so as to leave you to perish.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Saint Augustine, *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers; First Series, Volume 1*, 1886, translated by J. G. Pilkington, edited by Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Henderickson, A.D. 423), 558.

<sup>29</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions and Letters of Augustin, with a Sketch of His Life and Work*, 544.

St. Chrysostom (AD. 347-407) was perhaps one of the most prolific writers on the subject of the pastoral role. In his work, “Concerning the Christian Priesthood,” Chrysostom explains why he feels that he is not qualified to fill the role of pastor, while at the same time hoping that his friend Basil, whom he felt was qualified, would surrender to shepherd God’s flock. He states:

What advantage, pray, could be greater than to be seen doing those things which Christ with his own lips declared to be proofs of love to Himself? For addressing the leader of the apostles He said, Peter, lovest thou me? and when he confessed that he did, the Lord added, if thou lovest me tend my sheep. The Master asked the disciple if He was loved by him, not in order to get information (how should He who penetrates the hearts of all men?), but in order to teach us how great an interest He takes in the superintendence of these sheep.<sup>30</sup>

Note how he moves from Jesus’ words to Peter’s responsibility. Moreover, Chrysostom understood the linkage of Jesus’ commands to Peter as commands for all shepherds who would follow. He also sees Christ’s words as an affirmation of the importance of the pastoral role and a reminder that faithfulness to pastoral responsibilities was an expression of love for God. However, he also understood that these responsibilities were not easily dismissed:

For the pastor of sheep has his flock following him, wherever he may lead them: and if any should stray out of the straight path, and, deserting the good pasture, feed in unproductive or rugged place, a loud shout suffices to collect them and bring back to the fold those who have been parted from it: but if a human being wanders away from the right faith, great exertion, perseverance and patience are required; for he cannot be dragged back by force, nor constrained by fear, but must be led back by persuasion to the truth from which he originally swerved. The pastor therefore ought to be of a noble spirit, so as not to despond, or to despair of the salvation of wanderers from the fold, but continually to reason with himself and say, Peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil. Therefore the Lord, when addressing His disciples, said, Who then is the faithful and wise servant? For he indeed who disciplines himself compasses only his own

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<sup>30</sup> Saint Chrysostom, *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, First Series, Volume 9*, 1889, translated by W. R. W. Stephens, edited by Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA.: Henderickson, A.D. 375-381), 39.

advantage, but the benefit of the pastoral function extends to the whole people.<sup>31</sup>

It was his knowledge of the heavy burden and responsibility that lay at the pastor's feet that caused Chrysostom to rebel against the pastoral office. It was not a dereliction of a scared duty, but a loving response to Christ; he felt that an unqualified pastor dishonored God:

If I were well qualified to administer this office, as Christ desired it, and then shunned it, my remark might be open to doubt, but since the infirmity of my spirit renders me useless for this ministry, why does my saying deserve to be called in question? For I fear lest if I took the flock in hand when it was in good condition and well nourished, and then wasted it through my unskillfulness, I should provoke against myself the God who so loved the flock as to give Himself up for their salvation and ransom.<sup>32</sup>

These are but a few of the samples from the ancient writers who submerged themselves in the imagery of the shepherd.

Although many would be quick to point to abuses of the pastoral office in ancient times, or to question other biblical interpretations of the patristic writers, the church fathers clearly understood that the role of the pastor was shaped by the shepherding metaphor. One cannot deny that the role of the pastor as a faithful shepherd was the foundation upon which the ancient authors recognized the office. This viewpoint of the ancient writers' did not stop at the end of the fifth century. Later writers also pondered the pastoral role and came to a similar conclusion. Puritan pastor Richard Baxter (1615-1691) had a passion for the shepherding metaphor. His words have spoken to countless pastors and provide wise counsel to those serving the church. J. I. Packer wrote:

...Baxter also focused my vision of the ordained minister's pastoral office. [The words of Baxter's *Reformed Pastor*] have hands and feet. They climb all over you; they work their way into your heart and conscience, and will not be dislodged. My sense of being called to preach the gospel, teach the Bible, and shepherd souls could have been learned from the Anglican ordinal that was used to

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<sup>31</sup> Chrysostom, *Treatise Concerning The Christian Priesthood*, 41.

<sup>32</sup> Chrysostom, *Treatise Concerning The Christian Priesthood*, 42.

ordain me, but in fact it crystallized out through my study of Baxter's own ministry and his Reformed (we would say, Revived) Pastor.<sup>33</sup>

Baxter spoke plainly when it came to admonishing the pastors of his day to the faithful administration of the biblical duties of the shepherd. Drawing largely from Paul's words in Acts 20:28, Baxter calls the pastorate of his day back to the role of the shepherd.

Baxter's identifies six key tasks for the pastor/shepherd:

1. The conversion of the unconverted<sup>34</sup>
2. A readiness to give answers to inquirers<sup>35</sup>
3. The building up of those who are already truly converted<sup>36</sup>
4. Oversight of families, to see that they are well ordered<sup>37</sup>
5. Visitation of the sick<sup>38</sup>
6. Reproof of Christians that are living offensively or impenitently<sup>39</sup>

Baxter spends a lot of time teaching on the importance of each of these practices and suggests their implementation because, as he saw it,

Too many who have undertaken the work of the ministry do so obstinately proceed in self-seeking, negligence, pride, and other sins, that it is become our necessary duty to admonish them<sup>40</sup>

In his day, Baxter expressed concern over what he saw as a lack of pastoral care.

Ministry, he felt, was being limited by many pastors to Sunday morning preaching with no intentional individual care:

Why then should not the shepherds, the teachers, the physicians, the guides of the churches of Christ, take heed to every individual member of their charge? Christ himself, the great and good Shepherd, that hath the whole to look after, doth yet care of every individual; like him whom he describes in the parable, who left the ninety and nine lost sheep in the wilderness, to seek after one that was lost. The prophets were often sent to single men. Ezekiel

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<sup>33</sup> J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway Books, 1990), 13.

<sup>34</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 94.

<sup>35</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 96.

<sup>36</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 97.

<sup>37</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 100.

<sup>38</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 102.

<sup>39</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 104.

<sup>40</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 39.



was made a watchman over individuals, and was commanded to say to the wicked, Thou shalt surely die. Paul taught his hearers not only publicly but from house to house...<sup>41</sup>

For Baxter the shepherding metaphor carried with it great responsibility. Like the patristic writers, Baxter saw in the role of the shepherd the great mantle of Christ. Baxter insisted that pastors are shepherds under the Chief Shepherd; they are called to faithfully lead and nourish the flocks under their care.

In the twentieth century, many authors continue to lift up the biblical image of the shepherd and its vivid imagery. For example, E. Glenn Wagner, a pastor and former vice president in the Promise Keepers organization, wrote:

A subtle heresy has crept into the evangelical church. It seemed innocent enough at first, since it came from people who love Jesus Christ and his church. These folks meant well and sincerely wanted to stem the tide that has been threatening to engulf us...The problem? Like Esau, we pastors have sold our biblical birthright as shepherds called by God for the pottage of skills and gimmicks designed by humans. We have misunderstood the role of pastor and defined it incorrectly. We have left our biblical and theological moorings.<sup>42</sup>

This modern day writer looked at his ministry and saw how far he had fallen from the biblical model. In the end, he found himself called to leave a successful parachurch organization and return to the pastorate, not as a manger, but as a shepherd. Wagner recognizes that as contemporary pastors strive after being effective managers of their congregations they often miss the point of ministry. They abandon servanthood, the model Christ offered, for the role of chief executive. Wagner reminds his readers, “If your goal is to be a leader in the church, you won’t be a shepherd.”<sup>43</sup> This, of course, is not to deny the

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<sup>41</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 91.

<sup>42</sup> Glenn E. Wagner, *Escape From Church, Inc; The Return of the Pastor-Shepherd* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 17. For other contemporary authors who support the present validity of the shepherding metaphor see chapter 2 above

<sup>43</sup> Wagner, *Escape From Church, Inc; The Return of the Pastor-Shepherd*, 53.

leadership role of the pastor-shepherd; rather, it is meant to emphasize the appropriate motivation for pastoral ministry in the model of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Ancient and contemporary writers have examined both their hearts and the scriptures and found God's steadfast call for people to be shepherds of His flock. It is not an old idea that is in need of renovation, nor a new idea for church growth. The shepherding metaphor is God's model for His church. Faithful adherence to the role and image of the shepherd is the successful model by which the church of Christ will prosper.

*Chapter 5*

## DISCUSSION

The foregoing review of key people in the biblical narrative presented the canonical significance of the image of the shepherd. Moses led the people as a shepherd led his flock. He cared for their needs, making sure they had food and drink. When cure was needed, it was Moses, empowered by God, who offered the remedy (Numbers 21:9). In the life of David, a shepherd's heart was revealed. The one who cared for his father's flock was anointed to care for God's chosen people, the nation of Israel. As the Psalms reveal, David never forgot his shepherding task (cf. Psalm 23, 28, 100). The prophets, represented by Ezekiel, called for a people to be faithful to the divine Shepherd and proclaimed the promise of deliverance so that the sheep would not be scattered as a flock without a shepherd. Jesus took on the mantle of the Good Shepherd. He fulfilled the promise of God and called his apostles to shepherd his flock until he returned. Peter, fresh from the fishermen's trade, honored Christ's command to feed and take care of the sheep and he passed that directive on to those who followed.

Moreover, our review of the classical pastoral tradition from ancient times down to the present day has shown the resilience of the shepherding metaphor. The point of the metaphor seems clear. At the heart of the image is care. To care, the shepherd has to know his sheep. The faithful shepherd, contrary to those condemned in Ezekiel 34, is to strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind-up the injured, bring back the strays and search for the lost. That is what Christ did and that is what he calls the shepherds of his flock to do.

What is it, then, that leads me to believe that the contemporary pastorate has abandoned the biblical image of the shepherd? Although there is no doubt that many pastors today still honor the biblical model, a look at the current literature on church growth indicates

that a different paradigm is forming. The literature review (see above, chapter 2) named just a few of the books published that not only imply a move away from the metaphor, but some that outright abandon it.<sup>44</sup>

Communications with Frank Tillapaugh, a well-known author on getting the laity active in ministry, suggests that the transition from small to large congregations necessitates such a move. Tillapaugh states, “My experience is that senior pastors who take a personal and direct responsibility for the shepherding of their entire flock tend to be pastors of small congregations that remain small.”<sup>45</sup> My communication with Tillapaugh does not lead me to believe that he is anti-small church. Tillapaugh is an advocate for reaching the lost with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, he does not want to see churches get comfortable being small, self-serving ministries; he wants the laity to be faithful to proclaiming the truth of salvation. In fact, Tillapaugh wants to empower the laity to move beyond the church’s four walls and use their gifts to reach the lost. Nonetheless, as committed to evangelism as he is, his statement does reveal a trend in the churches of North America: to be considered a successful pastor one must lead a mega-church, and for a church to reach the “mega” class, pastoral care has to be removed from the shepherd’s responsibility.

In contrast, others have found themselves moving back to the image of a shepherd. Though they once found themselves caught up in the CEO model that drives so many church-growth advocates, these pastors found that the change in roles left them empty. Eugene Peterson confessed that he found himself at odds with his Christianity when he surrendered to the “professional” task of being a religious manager, instead of a shepherd. He found that as a career pastor he was forgetting the heart of the shepherd. He had “no time for personal

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<sup>44</sup> Borden, *Hit The Bullseye: How Denominations Can Aim Congregations at the Mission Field*, 22-26.

<sup>45</sup> Frank Tillapaugh, "Email," 03/02 2004.

relationships and no time for prayer.”<sup>46</sup> Peterson desired a return to the shepherding model. He said he “wanted to deal with God and people” and he wanted to “study God’s Word long and carefully,” so that he could preach and teach accurately. He continued:

I want to pray, slowly and lovingly, so that my relation with God will be inward and honest. I want to be with [the congregation], often and leisurely, so that we can recognize each other as close companions on the way of the cross and be available for counsel and encouragement to each other.<sup>47</sup>

Peterson ached for the call that God had imbedded in his heart. He saw himself becoming a manager at the expense of being a pastor, a shepherd. For Peterson, becoming the pastor God called him to be required that he allow the other members of the body of Christ to perform their various roles. Peterson did not have to prove that he was the leader by being at every meeting and managing every decision. On the contrary, he found his leadership enhanced and embraced when he honored the biblical model.

Pastor David Hansen recounted a time when an “elderly, infirm parishioner appeared on the screen of [his] mind.” He knew that “she needed a call” but he had already planned to go fishing. After a quick prayer, he went fishing and she died.<sup>48</sup> What blessings did this pastor miss because he put his pleasure before the needs of one of the saints? As a pastor, he could have been there as this Christian traveler entered the presence of the Lord. Clearly being a biblical pastor does not mean failing to care for oneself. But it does mean getting out of the attitude that pastoral calls are an obligation, and getting into the biblical paradigm of the shepherd. A shepherd makes sure the flock is cared for, even when it means long hours. A shepherd knows how each sheep moves. The shepherd can recognize when an animal is sick or in need of care. As the shepherd moves about the flock, he is watchful and patient. The

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<sup>46</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 38.

<sup>47</sup> Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 39.

<sup>48</sup> David Hansen, *The Art of Pastoring: Ministry Without All The Answers* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 55.

clock does not beckon the shepherd away from the flock; indeed, the shepherd finds a level of joy in the company of his flock.

It appears that the joy of being a shepherd is lost on many pastors today. It seems that some pastors just want to preach God's Word—often at the expense of living it in their calling. In honoring the power of God's Word, many seminaries risk failing to call graduates to take the call to shepherd to heart. The attitude is that if “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16) then all the pastor should have to do is teach God's Word and the rest will take care of itself. Jesus Christ did far more than teach from the Scriptures; he built relationships, he sought out the lost, he healed the sick, he fed the hungry. He was a doer of the Word (James 1:22, KJV).

Pastors who have moved away from the shepherding model have done so at the cost of their calling. In the end, they fail their congregations. These pastors are not liars or cheats. They are not stealing money from the offering, but they are stealing just the same. They are not honoring God's model; service is replaced by being the manager or CEO. In their desire to be seen as leaders, they fail to lead in the model of Christ. Jesus never had to assert his authority; it was evident in everything he did. It is clear from the narrative of the New Testament that Jesus spent more time living the shepherding model than preaching. I believe that the pastor who embraces God's shepherding model will see the glory of God visit his congregation.

*Chapter 6*

## ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE SHEPHERDING MODEL

Few pastors would boldly state that they do not believe in the shepherding metaphor. In fact, most would be quick to indicate that they are shepherds and reject the appearance of following a CEO or manager model. However, by following many of the contemporary church growth strategies these same pastors abandon the shepherd's heart for business practices that lead by positional authority. Likewise, there are those who believe that the move away from the shepherding model is a necessary response to cultural realities. It is not a failure to recognize the biblical model; it is a belief that the biblical model has to be refined in light of modern circumstances. In this chapter, I explore some of the common arguments against the shepherding model.

**How can you expect the contemporary pastor to commit so much time to individual care? As God blesses churches with numerical growth, it becomes impossible for the pastor to know each member by name. Besides, everyone is too busy to spend time with his or her pastor.**

This same objection surfaced in the days of Baxter.<sup>49</sup> Regardless of the fact that the 1600s did not have children's organized sports, dual income families or automobile transportation, time concerns came to the forefront. This objection claims that contemporary culture in North America will not allow us to be faithful to the shepherding task: Perhaps the small congregation can use the shepherd model; the pastor of a large congregation cannot meet such unrealistic demands.

To answer this objection one need only consider Paul who traveled countless miles to proclaim the Gospel. Paul did not fly in and out of cities like a special speaker called in to

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<sup>49</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 212.

speak at a revival meeting. In each setting, he spent as much time as was needed to raise up able leadership to carry on the work in his absence. Without the modern benefits of computers, rapid transit, telephones and the like, Paul taught “publicly and from house to house” (Acts 20:20). Likewise, Jesus the great shepherd taught and touched lives in the synagogues (Mark 1:21), on the mountainsides (Matthew 5:1-2), and on the plains (Matthew 8:1-4). His ministry certainly was amidst large groups, but he still ministered to individuals (cf. Matthew 8:14-15, Luke 5:12-14, Luke 18:5, John 4). For Jesus, relationships were critical and he trained his disciples in the same manner.

This leads to the issue of staffing. A review of staffing lists at numerous churches reveals the management paradigm to which pastors are succumbing. Instead of seeking pastoral commitment and competence, positions are filled by technical specialists. Titles such as Youth Director, Office Manager, Business Planner, Outreach Director and more indicate that the shepherding task is fading, if not lost. By design, the Director of Music makes sure that sheet music is ordered and choral perfection results. The Youth Director makes sure there is a full schedule of youth activities and that there are (hopefully) competent youth workers to “minister.” Each function is performed, but the focus on pastoral care is missing. The congregation may even call the director by the title pastor, but the title is not earned, nor is it honored. The title does not make the shepherd; a caring heart along with an intentional effort to lead and nurture the flock make the pastor a true shepherd.

Perhaps it is easier to find people interested in church work, without the weighty mantle of spiritual leadership. Directors, managers and planners fit a business role, not the biblical model. Ordained leaders—people answering the inward call as recognized by the church body for the pastoral task—are not always easy to find. Sometimes God’s timing seems too slow and churches take the easy route to fill a position. It is true that a pastor



should not take on more than he can handle. However, that should not mean that churches add staff to the detriment of shepherding care.

Baxter was concerned about pastors in his day focusing on their personal earnings over their ability to meet the needs of their congregations. As noted above (chapter 2, page 10), Baxter would have a pastor offer up a portion of his salary to raise up additional ordained leadership, rather than fail to carry out the ministerial duties and deal personally with the people of the parish. The biblical model supports the idea of such hiring practices:

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:1-6)

In the early church the apostles, initially given the task to proclaim the Gospel and teach obedience to the commands of Jesus (Matthew 28:16-20), needed help in providing care. Their answer was not to ignore the problem, but to allow the believers to choose people among them that were “known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.”

The text indicates that men were chosen and ordained for the task of care.<sup>50</sup> Note that the biblical text that follows does not emphasize the table waiting efforts of these men, but their service for the Gospel. Consider Stephen’s story in Acts 6:8-7:60 and Philip’s in Acts 8:26-40. Too many churches use this text to justify the importance of deacons—a term not used in the text—instead of recognizing the faithful model of shepherding.

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<sup>50</sup> The Old Testament concept of ordination (see Exodus 28:41) is not explicitly referred to in the New Testament, but most would recognize the act of laying on of hands (especially by the apostles) as the act of ordination, consecration or setting apart. See Oden, *Classical Pastoral Care, Volume 1; Becoming a Minister*, pp. 116-119

The shepherding model puts the “care of souls” as the priority. Instead of filling positions and adding more management responsibilities to the duties of the senior pastor, shepherds are added to assist in the care of the “flock.” I would recommend that the church seek and ordain people that God has prepared for the task. This does not mean that the senior pastor can take the responsibility off his list of “duties.” To the contrary, this action should provide the senior pastor with greater freedom to focus on the lost or straying sheep.

**If I give so much of my time to individual care, I will fail to be prepared for the pulpit**

The idea of the time for care taking away from preparation time for the preaching of God’s Word came up often in my studies. I recall lessons in my Preaching Practicum class in seminary mentioning the extensive time needed for sermon preparation. Although I am not a regular Sunday preacher, I have had numerous opportunities to preach from the pulpit. I would agree that each time I was called to preach I needed numerous hours of prayer and study before I felt I could stand before a congregation.

Nevertheless, I also recognize that the best results were those times when God blessed me with living examples for the message. Knowledge of the congregation and its individuals made the message real. Book study is important, perhaps critical, but hearts are best touched when God works through individuals in touch with his daily movement in the lives of people.

Regarding the importance of putting individual care into practice and the value of experience, Baxter answers much more profoundly:

And perhaps it will be found, before we have done, that this employment tends to make men much abler pastors for the Church, than private studies alone. He will be the ablest physician, lawyer, and divine too, that addeth practice and experience to his studies: while that man shall prove a useless drone, that refuseth God’s service all his life, under pretense of preparing for it, and lets men’s souls pass on to perdition.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 214.

The seasoned preacher who honors the shepherding model will benefit from the cumulative nature of soul care. As years go by, living examples and images of the Gospel being lived in the hearts of the congregation provide much of the sermon preparation. Years of study, coupled with living among the congregation provide the meat of each sermon. Whereas the new preacher must do all of the exegetical spade work for the sermon text, the seasoned shepherd may need only an exegetical review and a fresh homiletical form. Rather than grasping for more independent study time, a pastor should practice the spiritual discipline of a regular, systematic, and consistent reading of Scripture and journaling of insights along with meaningful contact with his congregation. This will produce soil that is richly fertile with more homiletical ideas than one will have opportunity to use sermonically.

**Many pastors have seen their ministry destroyed by burnout and over commitment. How can any pastor live up to the expectations of the shepherding metaphor?**

Did not Jesus say, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24)? Did not Jesus empty himself of equality with God for the sake of serving (Philippians 2:6-7)? Jesus Christ gave of himself beyond anything he asks us to do. Peter, Paul, Stephen and other biblical examples demonstrate an unswerving devotion to God’s call to be shepherds.

Certainly, the idea of personal care for the sake of longer ministry seems reasonable. Any one who would purposely abuse his or her physical or mental health would be a poor steward. Yet, God knows our needs and our limitations. God calls us to give of ourselves and promises that he will provide for us (cf. Romans 8:26, 2 Corinthians 12:9, 1 Peter 4:11). Consider Elijah after his successful ministry at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). No sooner had he defeated the prophets and priests of Baal and he was fleeing the angry wife of Ahab. He exhibited all the symptoms of burnout, but God intervened. He did not excuse him from the task, but provided Elijah what he needed; food and rest and a glimpse of God (1 Kings 19).

That is not to say that the pastor should ignore family and health for the sake of caring for everyone else. The scriptures remind us that our bodies are the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19) and that we should take care of this temple. In calling us to selfless service Paul still recognizes the importance of personal care and interests; “each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4). Pastors will certainly suffer burnout when they try to do it all. Every church activity may represent a good purpose, but the busyness of ministry must not ignore the heart of ministry, shepherding care.

When the intentional focus of ministry is on shepherding care, priorities will be come to the surface. The pastor(s) will not have to be at every meeting. Instead, they will have equipped faithful believers to use their various gifts for the glory of God. The pastors become the purveyors of God’s vision as they devote themselves to God’s call in their lives. As the congregation lives out God’s plan for the body of Christ, the unity of purpose brings God glory. God builds the body of Christ to be interdependent. Each member must learn to serve out of his or her giftedness. The pastor must model that faith and thereby help to mentor believers in their roles in the body of Christ. Pastors cannot do every good thing, but they must do the best things that God has called them to do.

Fear of burnout should not be an excuse to avoid serving as a shepherd. If God calls a pastor, he or she can certainly trust God with the task of caring for the needs of ministry. Wise stewardship is a required. Nevertheless, the passion for souls should be an overriding theme of any ministry that seeks to serve Christ.

**North American culture pushes for independence and autonomy. How can one expect contemporary society to “submit” to pastoral authority? Has not church discipline disappeared because people no longer accept spiritual leadership?**

This is a case of the symptoms being explained as the cause. To say that church members will not submit to pastoral authority because of an independent attitude misses the diagnosis. This argument suggests that the modern pastor must merely be one who offers instruction when invited or, at the very most, only in the church setting. Anything more would be intrusive.

These objectors claim that our culture forces us to abandon the shepherd’s task of “going after the lost sheep” (Luke 15:4). Unlike Paul, they would say, the contemporary pastor cannot be so bold to pass judgment on an unrepentant sinner (1 Corinthians 5:3), nor admonish believers to grow in faith (Hebrews 5:11-14).<sup>52</sup> However, the fact of the matter is that people long for a nurturing form of leadership. Modern business books have trumpeted the value of shepherding leadership in methods such as “management by walking around”<sup>53</sup>

In this style, managers learn more about their people and operations by spending time with them individually; it is a shepherding model. It gives the manager insights into each employee and allows him or her to provide valuable input for growth. People do not complain that their boss is spending time with them; on the contrary, they feel important and cared for. The manager who leads by compulsion more often than not fails to be a leader. However, the manager who leads by example and compassion succeeds. The shepherding leader earns the right to admonish and teach.

Jesus’ ministry demonstrated compassion and care. He did not have to assert his authority; he earned it by the example he lived. Consider just a few examples from the ministry of Christ. The miracle that initiated his ministry was that of turning water into wine,

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<sup>52</sup> Although the authorship of the book of Hebrews is still in question, this author considers it Pauline

<sup>53</sup> The MBWA theme can be found with a google.com search using “management by walking around”

an act of service (John 3). Likewise, Jesus demonstrated his power by providing Peter a full catch of fish after a night of failure (Luke 5). Jesus fed over 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish (Matthew 14). Jesus could have used demonstrations of power such as calling fire from heaven (2 Thessalonians 1:7), or legions of angels to protect him (Matthew 26:53), but he chose care. One can see the shepherd's heart in every aspect of his ministry.

Even in his last meal with his disciples, Jesus was teaching servant leadership. After washing their feet he asked:

Do you understand what I have done for you he asked them? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. (John 13:12-15)

Jesus did not want the leaders of the church to "lord it over" the people, he wanted them to be servants (Matthew 20:25-28). That was his example, an example he commanded them to follow.

Church discipline and pastoral authority have not departed because the culture has abandoned it. It has been lost in large measure because pastors have failed to be servant leaders. Sin will flourish in a congregation when soul care has a low priority. How can any pastor expect to comfort, counsel or confront any member of his congregation without intimate knowledge of the struggles, hurts and challenges he faces? Likewise, how can the shepherd of the flock protect the sheep unless present with them? Consider John Climacus' comments:

Let the shepherd cease not to play the pipe of exhortation when his sheep are grazing, and especially when they are settling down to sleep, for there is nothing which the wolf so fears as the tones of the shepherd's pipe<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> John Climacus, "To the Shepherd" as cited in Oden, *Classical Pastoral Care: Volume One; Becoming a Minister*, 51.

Perhaps there are many other arguments against fulfilling the biblical model of the shepherd. Indeed, they may have a kernel of validity, but all of them seem ultimately to be denials of God's command. Many would love to be able to move away from some difficult teaching of God's Word for the sake of personal comfort. To have the right to select the verses that apply to life would make the Christianity an easier lifestyle. Nevertheless, we cannot deny the plain words of Christ to a shepherd named Peter: feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, feed my sheep (John 20:15-18).

If one could trivialize the words of Christ, then one can move away from the shepherding task. If one can deny the way the apostles lived out the shepherding role, one can deny its applicability to Christ's continuing ministry in the world. If not, one must choose to obey or leave the shepherding task to others whom God has called and empowered for the task. We dare not stray from the path that God has ordained.

## *Chapter 7*

### RETURNING TO THE CARE OF SOULS

One of the most powerful biblical images for one who cares for the souls of others is the Old Testament image of the shepherd. Shepherds lead their sheep to places of nourishment and safety, protect them from danger, and are regularly called upon for great personal sacrifice. They are characterized by compassion, courage, and a mixture of tenderness and toughness. The prophet Ezekiel presents the soul shepherd as one who leads and guides the sheep, arranges for their food, ensures their safety, heals the sick, binds up the broken, and seeks out and finds the lost (Ezek. 34:2-16).<sup>55</sup>

If the shepherding metaphor of Scripture and the classical pastoral tradition is perennially valid, then the question of actual contemporary application is critical. How should shepherding care be made manifest in the pastorate? By returning once more to the words of the prophet Ezekiel we can glean a number of practices expected of faithful shepherds. Care, according to Ezekiel's pronouncement, is defined as strengthening of the weak, healing the sick, binding up the injured, bringing back strays and searching for the lost. Jesus' words to Peter emphasized feeding and caring, and Jesus commanded the apostles to teach everything that he commanded (Matthew 28:16-20). Teaching publicly and from house-to-house was a theme of the apostles (cf. Acts 5:42, 20:20). Every action of the shepherd falls within the concept of soul care. In this chapter aspects of soul care are presented and recommendations for application offered. The list could be extensive; however, the key elements suggested are that of teaching, prayer and visitation.

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<sup>55</sup> David G. Brenner, "Nurturing Spiritual Growth," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 30, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 25.



## Teaching

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2-4).

I have no doubt that every pastor in North America recognizes the teaching and preaching of God’s Word and prayer to be the top priority in ministry. Jesus spent a great deal of time with his disciples, teaching them to understand God’s Word.<sup>56</sup> He used parables, lectures and object lessons to open their hearts and minds.

In the end he told them that they still needed someone to help them in their ministry, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26). Empowered by the Holy Spirit, every pastor must endeavor to clearly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and teach believers to obey everything Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:20).

However, if a pastor decides that the teaching of God’s Word is limited to Sunday mornings, he has missed the clear teaching of Scripture. On the contrary, considering Jesus’ example, teaching was a constant and consistent activity. Jesus used everyday activities to teach about kingdom living. Whether he was healing the sick, answering the questions of an inquirer, or getting ready for lunch, Jesus was prepared to teach the truth (consider John 5, John 3:1-22, Matthew 15:32-37). Baxter stated:

If you intend the end of the ministry in the pulpit only, it would seem you take yourselves for ministers no longer then you are there. And, if so, I think you are unworthy to be esteemed ministers at all.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Since the NT writings were not in existence during Jesus’ ministry, the focus was on the Hebrew Scriptures and Jesus example as God in the flesh

<sup>57</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 65.

The greatest of pulpiteers—with walls full of degrees, a command of the biblical languages and libraries full of great spiritual literature—cannot expect to hold the attention of a congregation for season after season based on knowledge of the subject matter alone. The careful study of the Bible and other helpful works must have a priority in the pastoral life, but it cannot be the only source of knowledge and information. Unless the pastor knows the people that he is preaching to, the people will only be educated or entertained. Except as God pricks hearts, excellent sermons that do not speak to where the hearer is will fall on stony ground.

### Prayer

Prayer precedes teaching (the ministry of the word) in the New Testament reference above (Acts 6:2-4). Prayer is the focal point of a God empowered life. When the disciples were unable to cast an evil spirit from a boy, Jesus stated, “This kind can come out only by prayer” (Mark 9:29). Jesus lived a life so committed to prayer that others wanted to learn from his example (Luke 11:1). James made prayer the centerpiece of the pastor’s healing ministry (James 5:14).<sup>58</sup> Yet, prayer can easily become the most overlooked discipline of the pastorate.

Consider Eugene Peterson’s words:

If we polled our pastor colleagues, as someone every now and then does, we would get a variety of responses. One response – which would be in predictably short supply, though – would be “prayer.” I don’t mean that the poll would show that pastors do not pray but rather that they don’t view prayer as the central and essential act that keeps pastoral work true to itself, centered in word and sacrament.<sup>59</sup>

That is not the way it has always been:

For the majority of the Christian centuries most pastors have been convinced that prayer is the central and essential act for maintaining the essential shape of the ministry to which they were ordained.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The term *πρεσβύτερος*, used in this text is the same term used in 1 Peter 5 as discussed in the section on the biblical background. It denotes the shepherd(s) of the flock

<sup>59</sup> Peterson, *Working The Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, 26.

<sup>60</sup> Peterson, *Working The Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, 26.

It appears that over the centuries the pastorate has transformed itself from a prayer-centered vocation to a task-oriented vocation. Pastors can fall into the trap of doing the job of a pastor instead of being a pastor. The hours of the day become filled with tasks to be completed and problems to fix. Pastor Eugene Peterson found that his “demand-filled day[s] [were] welcome...it was nice to be needed, more than nice: it was downright flattering.”<sup>61</sup> The late night call may be an interruption, but the feeling of being needed so much that one would call, no matter the time can be gratifying. At first this is how Peterson saw it until,

The edge began to wear off the flattery when I realized that among the considerable demands on my time not one demanded that I practice a life of prayer. And yet prayer was at the very heart of the vocation I had entered.<sup>62</sup>

Peterson found himself at odds with his pastoral calling. His job was not to be a “moral errand-boy doing the good deeds in the congregation and community that others...didn’t have time [to do].”<sup>63</sup> He was called to “respond with reverent prayer to the demand of God for our attention, to listen to him, to take him seriously in the actual circumstances of this calendar day, at this street address.”<sup>64</sup>

Unfortunately, Peterson’s experience is likely common in churches around the world. If the pastor is not careful, he will be caught in a trap of busyness that will foster a weak prayer life in the congregation.

Prayer moves from being the central discipline of the pastoral life to a quick item to check off the list of things to do,

Pastors routinely, by virtue of our work and what other people think of as our work, are called upon to pray in ceremonial and decorative ways. We open meetings with prayer. We lead congregations in prayer. Sometimes we

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<sup>61</sup> Peterson, *Working The Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, 64.

<sup>62</sup> Peterson, *Working The Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, 64.

<sup>63</sup> Peterson, *Working The Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, 64.

<sup>64</sup> Peterson, *Working The Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, 65.

begin the day with prayer...Prayer gets things started off on the right foot...<sup>65</sup>

Over 350 references to prayer in some form throughout the New Testament point to its central importance. Yet, prayer is the task with which so many Christians struggle. We acknowledge its importance. We can quote the key passages, such as, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17, KJV) or “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6), but we seem to fall short. The last thing we need is for our pastors to reinforce a prayerless attitude.

Most of the people we meet, inside and outside the church, think prayers are harmless but necessary starting pistols that shoot blanks and get things going. They suppose that the “real action,” as they call it, is in the “things going”-projects and conversations, plans and performances. It is an outrage and a blasphemy when pastors adjust their practice of prayer to accommodate these inanities. The irony in all this is that by putting prayer in the apparent first place we contribute to its actual diminishment. By uttering a prayer to “get things started” we legitimize and bless a thin and callow secularism – everyone is now free to go his or her own way without thinking about God any more.<sup>66</sup>

The person most pastors would “prefer to emulate is the prophet.”<sup>67</sup> Providing eloquent and persuasive challenges to the people around us is the stuff of heroes. However, an examination of the prophets of old would reveal that their prophetic messages were the result of their communication with God. One must first hear from God before one can claim, “thus says the Lord.”

In that sense,

Prayer is not something we think up to get God’s attention or enlist his favor. Prayer is *answering* speech...We require repeated and forceful reminders: the first word is everywhere and always God’s Word to us, not ours to him.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Peterson, *Working The Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, 45.

<sup>66</sup> Peterson, *Working The Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, 46-47.

<sup>67</sup> Peterson, *Working The Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, 38.

<sup>68</sup> Peterson, *Working The Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, 47.

Pastors must rediscover the discipline of prayer. Not centerpiece arrangements that color the surroundings, but God-oriented, Bible-centered answers to the word God has already spoken. Reading the scriptures must be a two-way process in which the pastor is formed by God's Word, not just informed about past actions. We must not just hear God's Word we must answer it. The study of God's Word should be part of the communication process. It is easy to put on the teacher's hat and study for the oral report. Most anyone can read from a book and report on its contents, but a pastor has so much more to do. He has been entrusted with the prophetic ministry; how can a pastor dare to speak for God without answering to his word?

### **Visitation**

Then away with the modern fallacy that what the church wants, demands, and first of all must have are pulpiteers and only pulpiteers - men who spend the major part of their time and strength wrestling with homiletics and exegesis! The call is for a new, yet old emphasis upon pastoral calling as one of the best ways to achieve commanding sermonic ability and results. Yes, study we shall; preach we shall; but parish-wide visitation, faithfully, intelligently, and continuously carried on, we must not omit.<sup>69</sup>

Here is an area in which most pastors would likely acknowledge a shortfall. Some would recognize it as an area in need of improvement, while others would consider it an unnecessary requirement. In his discussion of the breadth of literature on pastoral improvement, Eugene Dolloff states,

In the list of "must" books referred to, there were seventy-one in the field of sermons and preaching techniques. Of course we need stronger sermons from scores of skillful preachers. But what about pastoral visitation? It is our unqualified conviction that preaching and parish-wide pastoral calling are not only equally important, but always interdependent. They are but opposite sides of the same shield. To neglect one is to impoverish the other.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Dolloff, *The Romance of Doorbells: A Guide to Effective Pastoral Calling*, 24.

<sup>70</sup> Dolloff, *The Romance of Doorbells: A Guide to Effective Pastoral Calling*, 24.

Thomas Oden reflects the incarnational aspect of visitation when he says:

As God himself came to visit and redeem his people (Luke 1:68), so we go on behalf of God's Son to visit and share that redemption in our own arena of service. As God himself becomes personally and bodily present in the incarnation, so are we called to be personally present to those in our charge, especially those in urgent need. As God the shepherd goes out to the lost sheep and leaves the ninety and nine, so at times we must leave the secured flock and pursue the lost one who is at risk (Matt. 18:12). Pastoral visitation of persons is one way of reflecting the glory of God's own visitation of humanity in Christ, seeking the lost, redeeming sin, mending pain.<sup>71</sup>

A faithful program of visitation does not have the glamour of a public preaching ministry. Its goal is not recognition or financial gain, its goal is strengthening of the weak, healing the sick, binding up the injured, bringing back strays and searching for the lost.

Visitation requires much grace, patience, and commitment. The faithful pastor is willing to go unnoticed in the newspapers while quietly following the poor to their barrios, the sick to their bedsides, the melancholic to their isolation, the alcoholic to their dregs, the sincerely inquiring to their wrenching questions, the grieving to their hope, the dying to their rest. It is only by this outgoing watchfulness that one can "make full proof" of one's ministry (2 Tim. 4:5).<sup>72</sup>

Pastoral visitation is hard work and requires something that so many of us are uncomfortable with: time management. The pastoral office is not easy to quantify with a calendar and clock. Pressing needs of a parishioner put aside carefully laid plans. How can a pastor plan for regular visitation? To begin, a pastor must be committed to a ministry of visitation. Staffing, as suggested earlier (chapter 6, pp. 48-49) must recognize the importance and value of such care.

It has to become a discipline, like reading the Scriptures and prayer. Admittedly, visitation is a difficult task. It is hard to get started, but once started, the rewards are immense. When you ring a doorbell as part of a regular plan for visitation "more frequently than not [it] is, for the consecrated minister of Jesus Christ, the way to larger opportunity and wider

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<sup>71</sup> Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, 171.

<sup>72</sup> Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, 170.

service.”<sup>73</sup> Like any effort, visitation requires a plan. For Baxter it was a regular scheduled time twice each week to reach eight hundred families over the course of a year.<sup>74</sup>

Baxter had catechesis in mind for his visitation. He wanted to make sure his parishioners understood God’s Word and the Christian faith. These are laudable goals, but one can develop one’s own goals based on the maturity and needs of each person. Pastoral visitation also has the element of watchful care.

Not everyone in a congregation will be outwardly hurting or in rebellion against God. In many cases, the purpose of the visit will be for getting the pulse of the flock. This will help the pastor as he seeks to provide discipling care: Everyone the pastor spends time with will be somewhere on a spiritual continuum. Some will be seekers of God’s grace or perhaps even inquirers into the basics of faith. Others may be at a high level of maturity, seeking ways to be more like Christ in everything they do. Some will be working through painful circumstances and wonder where God is during their time of crisis. Still others may be playing with sin and not recognize the peril they face. As one begins a ministry of visitation, the goals should have a spiritual end in mind:

Traditional pastoral visitation has both qualities: an inquiry to see if faith is present and growing; and an on-site review to check on current developments.<sup>75</sup>

Or, as the apostle Paul describes the pastoral role, the goal is,

...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 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. (Ephesians 4:12-13)

When it comes to the task of visitation I recognize that different opinions will abound as to who has the responsibility for visitation; however, I concur with Oden when he says,

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<sup>73</sup> Dolloff, *The Romance of Doorbells: A Guide to Effective Pastoral Calling*, 16.

<sup>74</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 43.

<sup>75</sup> Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials Of Ministry*, 171.

The pastoral office is by definition a shepherding task that involves not just a single meeting with the flock, but continuing oversight and feeding. The analogy suggests a deeply involved relationship. It requires vigilance, constancy, at times "watching through the night," and above all, a caring heart.<sup>76</sup>

From the scriptural standpoint, I see visitation as part of the call to take care of and feed the sheep. The ordained ministry is unique in that by its very nature, people are generally more open to discuss spiritual things with the pastor. Additionally, if a pastor relegates the ministry of visitation to others without his own participation, great opportunities for growth are lost:

Obviously, expert and effective care is impossible unless the shepherd knows his flock, knows them not only as a body, but also as individuals. It is sacredly incumbent upon the shepherd to acquire this knowledge, and it is gained only as he goes to the people, only as he gives himself devotedly and continuously to the ministry of ringing doorbells. Even the most brilliant preacher will possess but a limited knowledge of the life, problems, hopes, fears, and aspirations of an individual, if he sees that person only when he is sitting under his preaching. The type of knowledge needed is never secured by remote control or connivance; it is gained only through personal contact.<sup>77</sup>

Likewise, how can anyone expect to pray fervently for someone he or she does not know? Personal relationships energize powerful prayer. When tears or joys are shared in personal relationships, it is easy to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

When planning a program of visitation pastors are well advised to keep their options flexible. In some cases, the easiest route will be to have members of the congregation come to pastor's study. However, pastoral visits should not be limited to such official surroundings. A pastoral visit to a home or workplace provides great opportunity for personal insight and ministry. Whereas in times past the pastor had an open invitation to visit unannounced, it would be wise to ask members of the congregation for permission to come to them. Regardless, pastoral visits provide open windows to the needs and desires of the flock.

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<sup>76</sup> Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials Of Ministry*, 171.

<sup>77</sup> Dolloff, *The Romance of Doorbells: A Guide to Effective Pastoral Calling*, 27.



Do not limit visitation to casual recognition in the vestibule after Sunday services. Pastors should ask questions about their member's spiritual state; ask them about their fears and joys. They need to get to know the pastor as well. Yes, pastors make mistakes and there will be times when those mistakes cause abuse and malice. Yet by God's grace people will grow to maturity and others will find out about the God the pastor serves and turn to Him for salvation.

It is not easy work being a pastor, but it is a blessed work. Faithful devotion to the shepherding model that God has provided has sustained pastors over the centuries. The vocation can be filled with pain, rejection, and betrayal on this earth, but our treasure is in heaven. Devotion to God and faithfulness to his call promises his peace and his joy, I know of no other vocation that can make such a promise.

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