



"Being cared about is something so desperately needed in this depersonalized world that people will crawl across a thousand miles of desert to get it."

—Wilber Sutherland

06-Dec-13

The Shepherd's Guidance (Part Two)

Although [Jesus Christ](#) is the Good Shepherd and the Chief Shepherd, as we saw in Part One, He is not the church's *only* shepherd. From the days of ancient Israel up through the New Covenant church era, He has also appointed under-shepherds to watch over His physical or spiritual flock—and this will continue into the Millennium ([Numbers 27:15-17](#); [II Samuel 5:2](#); [7:7](#); [I Chronicles 11:2](#); [17:6](#); [Psalm 78:70-72](#); [Isaiah 44:28](#); [Ezekiel 34:23](#); [37:24](#); [John 21:15-17](#); [Acts 20:28](#); [I Peter 5:2-4](#)). The Chief Shepherd provides the pattern for His under-shepherds, and thus He gifts them to carry out their responsibilities in a way that reflects His own shepherding. Notice some of the attributes of a godly shepherd:

- He cares for his sheep to the point of giving his own life for them ([II Samuel 24:17](#); [John 10:11](#), 13).
- He knows his sheep ([John 10:14](#)).
- He is known by his sheep ([John 10:14](#)).
- He feeds his flock ([Isaiah 40:11](#); [Ezekiel 34:23](#); [John 21:15](#), 17).
- He pays special attention to the young ([Isaiah 40:11](#); [John 21:15](#)).
- He gathers his flock when they become scattered ([Jeremiah 31:10](#); [Ezekiel 34:12](#)).
- He oversees the flock willingly rather than by compulsion ([I Peter 5:2](#)).
- He is not greedy for money, but eager to serve ([I Peter 5:2](#)).
- He serves by example rather than force ([Ezekiel 34:4](#); [I Peter 5:3](#); see [Matthew 25:20-28](#)).

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- He seeks out the lost sheep ([Deuteronomy 22:1](#); [Ezekiel 34:16](#); [Psalm 119:176](#); [Matthew 10:6](#); [18:10-14](#); [Luke 15:1-7](#)).
- He protects the sheep ([I Samuel 17:34-36](#)).

On the other hand, false shepherds also exist, those whom [God](#) has not appointed. Jesus describes a person who tries to access the sheep without going through Him as "a thief and a robber" ([John 10:1](#), 8). The thief comes "to steal, to kill, and to destroy" ([John 10:10](#)), though these actions may not be apparent on the surface. He also describes "hirelings," whose care is not for the sheep but for their own safety and security ([John 10:12-13](#)). Rather than laying down their lives for them, such hirelings abandon the sheep at the very time they need help the most.

God also calls attention to His appointed shepherds who have become derelict in their duties. In [Jeremiah 23:1](#), the One who became Jesus Christ pronounces a "woe" on "shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture," who have "scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them" (verse 2). He says in [Jeremiah 50:6](#), "My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray. . . ." [Jeremiah 10:21](#) speaks of shepherds who "have become dull-hearted, and have not sought the LOORD," and the result is that "they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered."

Likewise, Ezekiel mentions shepherds who feed themselves rather than the flock ([Ezekiel 34:2-3](#)); who rule with "cruelty and force" rather than strengthening, healing, binding what is broken, bringing back what was driven away, and seeking what was lost (verse 4). Though the most immediate application in these verses is to the physical leaders of the [nations of Israel](#), it also applies in antitype to the shepherds of God's spiritual flock.

Even though under-shepherds do not always perfectly emulate the Good Shepherd, He has nevertheless established their roles and offices, and He has specifically gifted them to serve in this way. This is the order that Jesus Christ has ordained, yet our carnal tendency may be to either abuse or rebel against this order—either to become too dependent on an under-shepherd or to reject human shepherds altogether, believing that we are better off on our own, finding our own food, and determining our own paths.

In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis describes the problem of being preoccupied with focusing on the extremes, and the relationship between shepherds and sheep is a ready application:

[The devil] always sends error into [the world](#) in pairs—pairs of opposites. And

he always encourages us to spend a lot of time thinking which is the worse. You see why, of course? He relies on your extra dislike of the one error to draw you gradually into the opposite one. But do not let us be fooled. We have to keep our eyes on the goal and go straight through between both errors. We have no other concern than that with either of them.

On the one hand, there is a grave danger when sheep relinquish all of their responsibility to an under-shepherd and become comfortable being carried around and bottle-fed. A sheep in such a position is consigned to spiritual immaturity by virtue of not "test[ing] all things; [and] hold[ing] fast what is good ([I Thessalonians 5:21](#)), not "hav[ing] their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" ([Hebrews 5:14](#)), and not "work[ing] out [their] own salvation with fear and trembling" ([Philippians 2:12](#)).

If a sheep believes that his standing before God is improved owing to who his under-shepherd is; that he should only eat what comes directly from the shepherd's hand; or that he will enter the Kingdom only by being with a particular group of sheep, he will be unprepared to fill a role in the coming [Kingdom of God](#). A sheep will be spiritually hobbled if he is focused on an under-shepherd more than the Chief Shepherd.

But, as Lewis points out, the opposite extreme is not the answer either. The condition of "sheep without a shepherd" is a consistently negative and deleterious image throughout Scripture ([Numbers 27:15-17](#); [I Kings 22:17](#); [II Chronicles 18:16](#); [Ezekiel 34:5-8](#); [Zechariah 10:2](#); [Matthew 9:36](#); [I Peter 2:25](#)). There are times when this happens to the sheep—rather than the sheep choosing it—because they are driven away or scattered by abuse and/or neglect. In such a case, all the sheep can do is beseech the Good Shepherd to gather them to the under-shepherd of His choosing.

Part Three will investigate the post-scattering attitude of sheep deliberately choosing to forsake all under-shepherds, as well as the general unsettled nature of the flock at this time.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Purpose of the Ministry](#)

by John O. Reid (1930-2016)

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John Reid identifies four separate ways we are taught: (1.) God's Holy Spirit (John 14:26) imparted to us after our calling (John 6:44) and baptism (2) His Word (II Timothy 2:14-15), (3) through physical observation (Romans 1:20), and (4) through the ministry. The purpose of the ministry is to take members from their point of calling, bringing them to the point where they can be of service to God, edifying them, equipping them for their job of ministering in divine things (Ephesians 4:11-12, I Corinthians 6:2-3), establishing spiritual unity, and bringing them to spiritual maturity or adulthood to the measure of Jesus Christ. The minister serves as a shepherd, teaching not autocratically, but through example (I Peter 5:1-3)

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Servant Leadership: Practical Meekness](#)

by David F. Maas

Much has been said and written about leadership in the church in the past several years. David Maas writes that godly leadership is an outworking of the virtue of meekness.

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