

1 PETER 5:1-5

OUR SHEPHERDING MODEL



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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FEBRUARY 12, 2023 (AM)

INTRODUCTION

I pastored for 12 years in the Scottish Highlands. During that time, I was surrounded by sheep: sheep on the roads, sheep on the mountains, sheep on the beeches, sheep in my yard. Many of the members were shepherds. Never a day went by without seeing a sheep or a shepherd. There was therefore an innate understanding of the most common biblical model of leadership being the shepherd and his sheep.

Here in West Michigan most of us don't have sheep or see sheep. We're therefore not so familiar with this biblical model of leadership. Added to this is the difficulty that American culture is so individualistic. We resent or at least resist authority and do not like anyone telling us what to do or not do. We definitely don't like to think of ourselves as sheep who need a shepherd.

But given how pervasive this imagery is in the Bible and how God has designed it for our spiritual benefit, how should we implement the shepherding model in our church? **How can we be better shepherds and better sheep?**

The sheep need this. Old sheep need to be reminded they are sheep who need a shepherd. New sheep need to be taught it for the first time. **The shepherds also need it.** Old shepherds need to be reminded of their duties and responsibilities, and new shepherds need to be taught it for the first time. **How can we be better shepherds and better sheep?**

BACKGROUND

In John 21, Jesus told the Apostle Peter three times, "Feed my sheep" (15, 16, 17). At the end of his first letter, Peter passes on this instruction to other shepherds too.



How can we be better sheep?



1. WE ARE STRAYING SHEEP

Throughout Scripture, sinners in general, and God's people in particular, are described as sheep

Sheep are foolish. I don't know what sheep would score in an animal IQ, but I think they would be close to the bottom of the scale. They seem to only know how to do one thing well – eat grass. They are so irrational. You watch them as they pause in front of a stream. They know they can't jump it or swim it. So what do they do? They jump in anyway!

Sheep are slow to learn. Every shepherd will tell you countless stories about how sheep can be taught a very painful lesson, and yet fail to learn the painful lesson. A sheep may get caught in barbed wire trying to break through a fence. And the next day it will try it again, and again....

Sheep are unattractive. Although some shepherds may tell you differently, to most of us when we get close up sheep are dirty, smelly, and ugly.

Sheep are demanding. They demand grass, grass, and more grass; day after day, and night after night. (Do they ever sleep?) And when snow is on the ground, they aggressively demand food from the shepherd. Just listen to them bleat if their troughs are empty even for a short time. And watch the life-or-death stampede when the shepherd appears.

Sheep are stubborn. Have you ever tried to move a sheep? It's like trying to move an elephant. Ever watched a shepherd try to maneuver a sheep into a fold or a dip-tank. It's like trying to wrestle with a devil. I've watched the most macho of men beaten by sheep.

Sheep are straying. Perhaps the main reason Scripture chooses sheep to characterize us, more than any other animal, is because of its well-deserved reputation for straying (Isa. 53:6) and getting lost (Lk. 15:3ff).

Sheep are copycats. When one sheep decides to start running, they all decide to start running. If you were able to ask one, "Why did you start running?" it would say, "Well, because he started running." The next would say the same. And the next one. And when you got to the last sheep he would just say, "I dunno."

Sheep are dependent. Some animals can cope and thrive without any close supervision. Not sheep. They are very dependent on their shepherd. They cannot live without him (or her).

The shepherd is a sheep. Before the shepherds start looking down on the sheep, remember the shepherd is also a sheep! This is what makes spiritual shepherding so difficult. The shepherd remains a sheep who also needs shepherding.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Let's confess we are sheep. There are many animals we would like to be compared to - a lion, an eagle, a horse, dog, a cat. But God wants us to see ourselves as sheep.

Let's pray for a shepherd. We need the Great and Good Shepherd to find us, save us, carry us, lead us, teach us. etc. But we also need under-shepherds if we are to thrive spiritually.

SHEEP NEED SHEPHERDS
WHO ALSO ARE SHEEP



So how does a sheep-like-shepherd shepherd sheep?



2. WE NEED STRONG SHEPHERDS

The Shepherd's Actions

"I exhort the elders among you...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight..." (1-2)

- **Mix:** Elders are to be among the flock, available, accessible, involved
- **Know:** Know the sheep as individuals with their own unique characters and needs
- **Gather:** The search out missing and straying sheep to lovingly bring them back to safety
- **Carry:** Weak sheep, sick sheep, young sheep, and old sheep, sometimes need carried (Isa. 40:11)
- **Lead:** The shepherd goes before the sheep and decides where they are going.
- **Feed:** Always thinking about the best food for each sheep (John 21:17).
- **Guard:** Watch out for dangers and protect from threats
- **Teach:** Sheep need trained and educated because they are foolish and prone to stray.
- **Rebuke.** Sometimes a wayward sheep needs discipline to stop them straying again.
- **Heal:** They remove barbs and stings, pour ointment into wounds, comfort through loss.

The Shepherd's Attitude

"...exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock" (2-3).

- **Not forced but as a volunteer:** Not lazily or reluctantly but with enthusiasm and energy
- **Not for their gain but the sheep's gain:** Not for personal profit but for the sheep's profit
- **Not a dictator but an example:** Not demanding respect but earning it, practicing what they preach.

The Shepherd's Assessment

"And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (4).

All shepherds must remember they are under-shepherds, under the Chief Shepherd, to whom they must give an account for how they shepherded his flock. Peter does not base his salvation on his perfect shepherding (because it wasn't perfect), but he does see his shepherding taken into account when the Chief Shepherd is distributing eternal rewards. And notice that the sheep also must give an account for how they submitted to their shepherds (5; Heb.13:17).

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Choose good shepherds. Nominate and elect those who have these qualifications.

Know your shepherd. Find out who your shepherding elder is and use him as your first responder/discipler.

Pray for your shepherd(s). Pray for your pastors, but also for your shepherding elder as his work is hard.

Welcome your shepherd. When he reaches out to you, respond and interact rather than suspect or resent.

Use your shepherd. Share your burdens, hopes, aims, fears, problems, aims, questions.

Submit to your shepherd. So long as they are following the Chief Shepherd, respect their decisions.

SHEPHERDS SHEPHERD FOR THE SHEPHERD



Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell the story > Change others' stories



SUMMARY



THE NEXT CHAPTER

Sheep, follow your Shepherd. Accept his oversight, his leadership, his teaching, his decisions, his example, insofar as they follow the Chief Shepherd. Ask them for help with spiritual questions, development, growth.

Shepherds, feed your sheep. That involves supervision of the teaching ministry of the church in the worship service, in the Sunday schools, small groups, etc. It involves protecting the flock from false doctrine and ethics. It involves personalized feeding.

Prayer: Chief Shepherd, we are all your sheep. Shepherd us all directly and through our under-shepherds, so that we all are gathered safely into your fold at the end.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do we resist the biblical imagery of sheep who need a shepherd?
2. How does viewing yourself as a sheep change the way you view yourself?
3. What makes it easier to follow certain shepherds more than others?
4. Which roles do you see our shepherds doing well and which not so well?
5. In what ways is our Chief Shepherd better than our under-shepherds?
6. How will this change the way you shepherd or are shepherded?

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