

What is the Biblical Role of a Shepherd?



By Pastor Abe Chan

Many of us struggle with ministry because we have no clear idea of who we are supposed to be. We function out of a sense of our identity; but if we are not clear on that identity, we will lose perspective of who we are and how God has called us to serve Him. Our ministry will have no real significance, joy, or effectiveness because who we are determines what we do. So, as a Christian leader in the church, what are we supposed to be and to do as a shepherd of God's people? What does the Lord expect of those who shepherd a spiritual flock?

A Shepherd that Feeds the Flock

The shepherd must feed the people of God. In the early days of the church, there was some confusion as to what type of work the disciples were responsible for and what they should leave for others. In addressing this, the disciples said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry

Pastors and elders, as well as other leaders in the church (Sunday school teachers, small group leaders, counselors, etc.) are called to shepherd the people of God under their care. But what does it really mean to shepherd God's people? Who are we as shepherds? What are we called to do?

of the word of God in order to wait on tables.... 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). For the apostles, the ministry of the word was their top priority. The shepherd is to nurture and nourish the flock with the whole counsel of God's word by providing a healthy and balanced diet that is centered on the truths of His word and on Jesus Christ. David Wiersbe reminds us that "When the menu comes from God's Word, the flock receives meat (Heb. 5:14), milk (1 Peter 2:2), and honey (Ps. 119:103)." Paul commissioned Timothy: "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus...I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Tim. 4:1-2). Shepherds need to reclaim this commission to preach and to teach with all authority from the Spirit. We must handle the word

of God with integrity. John Stott says, "Every authentic ministry begins... with the conviction that we have been called to handle God's Word as its guardians and heralds...our task is to keep it, study it, expound it, apply it, and obey it." As shepherds, we must not neglect this role of spiritually feeding the people of God and encouraging them to devote themselves to the study and the practice of God's word.

A Shepherd that Cares For the Flock

The shepherd must care for the people of God. Isaiah says the shepherd will gather the lambs in his arms and carry them close to his heart (Is. 40:11). This speaks of the care that all sheep require. It is no wonder that Jesus tells Peter repeatedly to feed his lambs, take care of his sheep, and feed his sheep. The leader who truly shepherds his¹ people will be a wounded healer to the flock. Ezekiel warns those who



The shepherd must love the people of God. Jesus calls us to a ministry of love...

did not do this: “You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured” (Ezek. 34:4). Do the people in our congregation know that when they are in a crisis, we will be with them? Do they sense our genuine care and concern for them? This requires us to get close enough to our people so we can see their wound and feel their pain. The ministry of presence is very important. Wiersbe says, “The sheep will not always recall our sermons, but they will remember our presence.” The shepherd must minister to people in their hour of need by sharing in their human journey, to come alongside those who need comfort, compassion, and consolation. Jesus said a true shepherd knows his sheep and he “calls his own sheep by name” (John 10:3). But it takes more than just knowing their names; we must get to know their character, uniqueness, fears, desires, hopes & dreams so that we can minister out of a knowledge of who they are. The shepherd spends time with the sheep as it is part of his overall nature. A correct picture shows the shepherd constantly walking among the flock. The flock hears his voice and knows that he is their shepherd. Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me” (John 10:14). He nurtures them, speaks to them, and cares for them such that they are inspired to follow him. Thus, it is important for our congregation to know and to see that we are indeed approachable, responsive, gentle, and genuinely filled with compassion. As shepherds who care for the flock, we

must encourage our people to be involved with one another's lives, to be a true biblical community, a loving body, a mutual sharing of lives together (1 Cor. 12-13), and a continual devotion to caring for one another (Acts 2:44-45).

[¹For the purpose of this article, the shepherd is referred to in the male, but its reference is to both men and women.]

A Shepherd that Leads the Flock

The shepherd must lead the people of God, as God's people, like sheep, need someone to guide them. The shepherd may be walking beside them, behind or in front of them, but he is always leading them. He must lead by keeping the flock together, unlike those that God spoke out against who allowed the sheep to scatter (Ezek. 34). The shepherd leads the people by uniting them around a common vision. God says in Jer. 3:15, “I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.” How does the Christian leader lead those who are under his care? How does he shepherd the flock of God in order for the sheep to grow and remain healthy? The shepherd leads by equipping others for ministry; he is more of a servant leader who empowers the laity (Eph. 4:12-13). The Lord has entrusted to shepherds the responsibility and authority to lead His sheep, to be examples to the flock so that they will grow and thrive (1 Peter 5:2-3). The shepherd exercises his leadership in a strong and effective manner, but he is to do this as a loving and caring shepherd,

not lording it over others. Jesus says that “His sheep follow him because they know his voice.... My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:4, 27). Sheep will follow those they trust. We must be able to establish trust with those we lead and shepherd or else no one will follow. This trust does not come naturally, but it needs to be earned over time. Let us not forget the purpose of our leadership is to lead the people of God to the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

A Shepherd that Loves the Flock

The shepherd must love the people of God. Jesus calls us to a ministry of love, but love requires action. This action comes in the form of protection and sacrifice. The intimate love we have for the sheep is due to the many years of journeying with them through all of life's challenges. By our actions, let us show our love for the sheep. By our words, let us remind them of God's love. As shepherds, we must often say to people how much we love them — how close they are to our hearts. Do we serve people because it is our job or because we are motivated by the love of Christ and for His sheep? True ministry happens when we serve out of the depths of Christ's love for His people. Wiersbe sums up the shepherd's relationship with the sheep: “The shepherd was a lover of the sheep, and it was because of his attachment to them that in time of danger he thought not of himself, but of them. In defending them he was willing to lay down his life. This was the crowning virtue of the shepherd — his self-sacrificing love.... Whatever other virtues a shepherd of Christ's sheep may have, he is poor and naked without love. He must have many virtues, but the one that gives vitality to all of them, and which binds them all together, is love. He has various works to do, but his

supreme work is loving. If he loves he will do all the things which shepherds ought to do.”

A Shepherd that Looks For Lost Sheep

The shepherd must look for the wandering and lost sheep. In Ezekiel 34:11-12, 16, “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...I will search for the lost and bring back the strays.” For whatever reason, the sheep have an inclination for getting lost; they instinctively go astray. The shepherd has a responsibility of searching for and rescuing the lost sheep. The image of the wandering sheep speaks of the sinful tendencies of the human heart as addressed by Isaiah 53:6, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray,” and Jeremiah 50:6, “My people have been lost sheep,” as well as by Jesus when he relayed the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7). When the sheep stray away, the true shepherd will look for the sheep wherever they are until they are found. He has to seek for and find them. Even the one sheep is so precious to him, he will spend the time and effort to search for it and to bring it back home (Matt. 18:12-14).

WHAT THEN SHALL A SHEPHERD BE AND DO?

When we reflect on the question: “What is the biblical role of a shepherd?” we need to consider not only the *ministry* of the shepherd (what he does), but also his *character* (who he is). Aubrey Malphurs says, “I’m convinced, after many years in ministry and working with other pastor friends, that the greatest challenge we face in life is developing godly character. And I’m convinced that people want, above

all else, leaders of good character. They want to believe in their leaders; they want to have faith and confidence in them as people. They want assurance that their word is trustworthy and that they’re excited and enthusiastic about the church’s direction. Godly character is the foundation of that kind of leadership.” The main concern is not really a particular skill we may or may not have, but it is our very being. Character is the foundation of our spiritual leadership and ministry.

A shepherd must live a life of holiness. He is to be an example of godliness to the flock. Paul says, “Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless...one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined” (Titus 1:7-8). The lifestyle and conduct of a shepherd must show that he can represent a holy God. In Lev. 11:44, God said, “I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.” As leaders who take on priestly roles, the shepherd must maintain a holiness and purity in his personal life. Many Christian leaders have plummeted from the heights of ministry into the depths of shame and ineffectiveness due to indiscriminate acts of immorality and impurity. We must guard ourselves against such great tragedy and not fall prey to this fate that awaits those who live the unexamined life. The shepherd must live a life that allows the word of God and the Spirit of God to continually transform his mind and heart into

the image of the Son of God — brilliant with light, filled with holiness.

A shepherd must live a life of humility. As shepherds, we must be able to say to our people, as Paul said to the believers at Ephesus, “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you... I served the Lord with great humility and with tears.” (Acts 20:18-19). The shepherd is called to follow the pattern of Jesus who humbled himself as a lowly servant and loved the people so much that he suffered and died for them (Phil. 2:5-8). This is the work of the ministry and those who lead God’s people must also exemplify sacrifice, devotion, submission, and lowliness in their lives. God requires those who lead His flock to be humble, loving servants. We must put our hope, faith and confidence in no one else except Jesus Christ for it is Him that we imitate. We must live a life of holiness and humility. God deliberately chooses the weak and foolish things of the world “so that no one may boast before him” (1 Cor. 1:29). The Lord did not give us a scepter to rule the people of our congregation; but rather, he gave us a staff to walk alongside of and to shepherd them: to feed them, to care for them, to lead them, to love them, and to look for those who are lost. Knowing that our role and identity as a Christian leader in the church is to be a shepherd to God’s people, how are we to fulfill this awesome responsibility? ■

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Upcoming Meetings

Elder Candidates Sharing Meeting

Sunday March 21

2:30 pm

Knight Street Sanctuary

All are welcome to come and hear the sharing by our Elder Candidates for 2010 - 2012. For more information on each of the candidates please pick up the insert at the Info Counter.

Annual Membership Meeting

Sunday March 28

2:30 pm

Knight Street Sanctuary

All VCAC members of Knight St., Fraser Lands, and North Burnaby are invited to attend the Annual Membership Meeting. One of the agenda items will be the voting in of the 2010-2012 Elders.

Lunch will be served at 12:45 pm at Knight Street.

If you plan on coming for lunch please sign up at the Info Counter by March 21st.

Easter Weekend Services



Good Friday Services April 2, 2010

Join us for any of our Good Friday services. A special combined service with our Knight Street, Fraser Lands, and North Burnaby congregations for each of our language groups.

English Service 10:00 am @ Fraser Lands Sanctuary
Speaker: Dr. Ross Hastings

Cantonese Service 10:00 am @ Knight Street Sanctuary

Mandarin Service 10:00 am @ Fraser Lands Chapel

Easter Sunday Services on April 4, 2010

Knight Street

Cantonese 8:00 am
English 9:15 am
Mandarin 9:15 am
Cantonese 11:00 am

Fraser Lands

Cantonese 9:15 am
Mandarin 9:15 am
English 11:00 am

North Burnaby

Mandarin 11:00 am



VCAC Baptism Celebration Sunday April 4

Rejoice and celebrate with our brothers and sisters who will be getting baptized this Easter.

English Congregations
3:00 pm @ Fraser Lands

Cantonese & Mandarin Congregations
7:30 pm @ Fraser Lands