

Shepherding, The Chief Shepherd

In the beginning of Psalm 23, which we all know, it says, “The Lord is my Shepherd.” So may we remember that the Lord Himself is our Shepherd.

I Peter 2:25: “For you were going astray as sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.”

Here the Shepherd and the Overseer of our souls is, of course, our Lord Jesus. And you think of how we as lost sheep were going astray. Also you might remember Isaiah 53 which says that we all were like lost sheep in our sins.

In I Peter 5:1-4 there is a term used of the Lord as a Shepherd, but the phrase of the title is “chief shepherd.” Notice this especially.

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am their fellow-elder and witness of the sufferings of the Christ, who also am partaker of the glory about to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God which is among you, exercising oversight, not by necessity, but willingly; not for base gain, but readily; not as lording it over your possessions, but being models for the flock. And when the chief shepherd is manifested ye shall receive the unfading crown of glory.”

Let’s pray together:

Lord, we come to you as our Chief Shepherd. We come to You as the One who is really looking over us and caring for us. And we can all willingly confess that we shall not want, we have no lack. Especially after remembering You this morning, we know that all our needs and all of our desire is bundled up in You, Lord, and You are our Shepherd. We just trust in You, Lord. We pray that You would feed us with Your Word and that Your Word would be nourishment to us, that You would show us the green pastures and that You would restore our souls. Lord, we pray that You would refresh us with that water that is drinkable and wonderful. In Jesus name. Amen.

The Shepherd and Overseer of Our Souls

The Apostle Peter in I Peter 5 is exhorting elders as a fellow elder. I am not an elder and I cannot exhort elders as a fellow elder, but Peter can exhort elders as a fellow elder because probably Peter was an elder in Jerusalem. But as a fellow non-elder I would like to exhort all of the non-elders to shepherd the flock under the Chief Shepherd. So I want to talk about shepherding and how it works, especially with Christ as the Chief Shepherd. Even from this passage you can see that though he is specifically talking about a situation of shepherding, he is connecting those who do shepherding with the Chief Shepherd. And it is not meant to be different from that. Whatever shepherding goes on in the church, however we care for one another, love one another, look out for one another and help each other, there is the first Shepherd, the Chief of the shepherds. He is the original Shepherd, our Shepherd, the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.

We were lost sheep, and we were rescued by that good Shepherd. He found us and cleansed us from our sins, put us on His shoulders and took us home to be with Him. We found Him as our Shepherd, and we have walked with Him as our Shepherd. We have known Him as our Shepherd, and we can say, "He has led us in paths for the sake of righteousness." We go down certain courses, and sometimes those courses are through dark valleys and are really difficult, but He has a purpose involved in it. He has a house that He is building, a place for us to live forever that He is bringing us to. He heals us, and He is working with us. I think we can all say that.

The Neglect in the Church

Probably as His sheep, we can also say that sometimes it seems like you feel neglected from being shepherded. I do not know how these two things work together. The Lord is my Shepherd; I have no wants, He is the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls, and He is the Chief Shepherd. However, it seems as if sometimes our Chief Shepherd allows me to experience feelings of being neglected, like I am not being shepherded. So there is some neglect in the church.

As I want to be shepherded, now I am thinking about other people around me. I am not thinking about just when it comes to me and the Lord. I feel like I need more so there is a little bit of neglect. We find this experience in the Scriptures even with the original church, even at the very beginning of the church. There seems to always be a wave of strong shepherding and then some neglect. But out of that neglect the Lord raises up parts of His body to do His work of shepherding. Even some of us who feel neglected end up being the very ones whom the Lord raises up to experience the Chief Shepherd. We have experienced Him as our Shepherd and Overseer of our souls, but to experience the Lord as the Chief Shepherd means that you experience a little bit of shepherding other saints also. It means that you get to know Him as the Leader of Shepherds and you get to be an under-shepherd under the Chief. It is like a new experience of shepherding where you almost get to set aside your needs for the moment. I am sure the shepherd who goes after the one and has to carry him back felt tired along the way as he searched and carried the sheep. So he may have felt some neglect of comfort. I am sure that many people who are helping others are themselves in need of something, but sometimes it is that very experience when you need something, the Lord calls you to help someone else in their needs. It is in that very situation that our Chief Shepherd shepherds us personally. It is one of His ways that He does work with us to actually help us.

For example, helping the neglect in the church, if there is such a thing, maybe accidental neglect, but the Lord has arranged it or the Lord has allowed it. If you think of the very beginning of the church in the book of Acts, in chapter 6 there is an experience among the widows. There were many widows in Jerusalem, and a lot of people moved to Jerusalem after the church was birthed. So many of those who moved there were from other areas outside of Judah who did not speak Hebrew naturally. They might have known it and knew how to read the Bible, but they mainly spoke Greek as their common language. So they called them Hellenistic Jews, which means they were Greek Jews, but they were neglected.

The twelve apostles as leaders were definitely called to shepherd. In John 21, Peter was exhorted, because the Lord was also restoring them, and he was kind of embarrassed in front of the others. He had been fishing again without catching fish, and the Lord was calling him to

shepherd the sheep and to feed the lambs, therefore he knew this calling. The twelve who were doing a lot of ministry as well as shepherding, were taking care of widows as well. It was a lot in making sure that they were fed, but in the midst of it, they accidentally neglected the Greek-speaking widows. They probably did not know of all their needs. The communication lines were very poor, so this complaint went around among the Christians. So this was the complaint, "I am not being shepherded."

We have experienced this. Probably if you have been a Christian for a little while, more than a month, you probably experienced a little wave of some murmuring like something is not as it should be. And typically the expectation is, "Those twelve apostles should be doing better." This is usually the feeling. Now I am not saying that this was the case with the saints, but it does say that there was murmuring.

The Seven were Raised Up

Now the good thing about this is that it became a healthy murmuring or at least some healthy believers knew what to do with murmuring. So I wonder if it was the brothers like Stephen, who became a martyr or Philip, who was later called the evangelist. I do not know who it was, but it says that eventually the murmurs got to the ears of the apostles. This is a good thing. I do not know if it was some feisty person just yelling at them. But probably it was a concerned believer knowing that the Lord is our Shepherd and seeing, "Hey, here is a want." Psalm 23 says, "I shall not want." So here is a concern, and they sought the Chief Shepherd. They did not just buckle up their strength and say, "Well, there are twelve of us; we can do this." Instead, they sought the Lord, and out of that neglect they said, "Let's search out seven others full of the Holy Spirit as models for the believers," which they did. We think of them as a deacon-type people, who are doing a physical task but to the glory of God. It is a wonderful thing! There was an aspect, a need within the shepherding experience, but it was pulled off of the twelve. I think there is something to that, and it was kind of nice. So an overflow of shepherding beyond the twelve apostles just happened, and the seven were raised up.

Another example is that they had to be people who were respected in their lives, they had to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Probably most of them were brand-new believers because they all had Greek names. Probably they were not ones who walked around for three years with Jesus. They may even have been saved at Pentecost. But either way these men of God were raised up and the neglect was gone, and shepherding was happening. It is wonderful! It was all under the Chief Shepherd. But that is a wave of a little bit of neglect.

The Apostles were Set Free

What were the apostles able to do? They were able to give themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. That does not mean that they said, "I am no longer shepherding." They still had to do shepherding ministry. They just had more on their team of shepherding now. So some aspects of shepherding could be handled by some others, like these seven. But when things came up, especially when it came to some major authority situations or oversight, that is especially what the apostles had to be involved in. But others were now being used for other regular things.

For example, Peter had to be involved with Ananias and Sapphira. We know Barnabas/Joseph sold his property and gave it to the church to help take care of the poor. Some others saw the praise and the glory that was in it, not that Barnabas was walking around with glory on him or boasting in it. But they saw it and Ananias and Sapphira sold their property and kept some of the money hidden. It was almost like that experience after the battle of Jericho when some things were stolen and hidden. Whatever it was, it was a sin unto death. Ananias and Sapphira came before Peter and other apostles, and it was exposed and the Holy Spirit just struck them dead. It is pretty wild to think about this in the church. That was the type of situations, which were a big deal, and not the normal stuff that most of us handle. None of us are talking to somebody and the Lord strikes them dead—not usually. But that was an experience of oversight of shepherding that the twelve apostles had to deal with.

Now we know that Peter himself was called to shepherd. I just read a passage in I Peter 5 which is talking to elders specifically because he was an elder probably in Jerusalem like John, who was also an apostle. So he was able to tell them: “Shepherd the flock.” He exhorts them as if this is really the main task: “If I have to exhort you on one thing specifically, shepherd the flock.” Peter knew about this. He knew about that wave of accidental neglect with the widows, and he knew through all of his experiences of so much going on. Even though he had given himself to prayer and ministry of the Word and was also going out to other parts of Judea and preaching in other places, he knew that the emphasis of the Chief Shepherd is to shepherd the flock.

In Acts 20 as the apostle Paul was traveling, he passed by Ephesus, and he gathered the elders of Ephesus together with him. He shared a number of things with them, one of them being, “I probably will not see you face to face again.” But the actual exhortation he gives is to shepherd the flock over whom the Lord has put you as overseers. That is the thing that he told them to do. He said, “I commit you to the word of His grace which is able to keep you.” And he warns them about some wolves that will rise up among them, but his exhortation was, “Shepherd the flock.” You can just see that if Paul felt the need to exhort to shepherd, and Peter felt the need to exhort to shepherd, it must be a normal experience that shepherding does not happen or is forgotten or is accidentally forgotten. So it would seem from the Scriptures that in the healthy time period it is like a wave of reminder that exhortation of shepherding is a great need. Because so much goes on, especially in their case when there were a lot of larger issues happening such as the Ananias and Sapphira type of stuff, the time got swallowed up.

So what I want to propose, which I think I can find from the Scriptures, is that the experience of the apostles and the elders was meant to be an example just as we read in chapter 5 of I Peter. They are meant to be models for the flock, examples for the flock. This calling to shepherd is an example for the flock.

The Apostles and Elders are to be Examples

So if it is an example for the flock, it means that the rest of us in the flock have some portion, maybe not the Ananias and Sapphira portion, not necessarily some who are in an authority spot dealing with some bigger issues. But when we are dealing with bigger issues like the church in Matthew 18 and your brother has sinned against you, probably you forgave him. Then you go to your brother to restore him. Is that shepherding? That seems like shepherding, and that is for

everyone of us. If the brother or sister is not responding, you grab another one, just a regular sheep, a regular person, not a deacon, not an elder. You just grab another, maybe two or three that the brother might respect, and you go and try to restore him that has just sinned and is being stubborn. This is restoring a broken sheep and going after that one sheep. This is a shepherding type of experience in Matthew 18 that is talking about the local church where we are experiencing two or three gathered in His name, and there we all have something to do with helping restore one another. Now if it gets so bad, you might tell it to the church, and then it comes into an authority spot. But either way we have our spots to play; we have something to do, and we have a place in this.

Elders are called to shepherd; that is like a verb. They are not called shepherds. The title used for those who are more spiritually mature is elders. There are also overseers who kind of look over what is going on, such as knowing when somebody did not show up. You know, they used to count how many came to meetings or events, but sometimes I am afraid of people who count us. I think it can be done right, and it can be done wrong. The right part is that when you find out this person has been missing for five weeks, you start to pray for them and join with the Chief Shepherd in this. He notices when people are missing for five weeks in a row. He notices. Also that term is sometimes translated 'bishop.' The King James will say 'bishop'; so if you have heard the term 'bishop' that is the word 'overseer' in a lot of our Bibles. Bishop is an elder and elder is a bishop. One talks about a position thing and the other is more of a function, like you are making sure the sheep do not fall off the cliff, type of thing.

But there is also a person who is called a shepherd. Of course, there are shepherds who shepherd real sheep as in Luke where you have the birth of Jesus and the shepherds. So that is the same word. But there is another case that is similar to what we have been talking about where there is a Chief Shepherd and there are under-shepherds. They are examples helping to equip the rest of us.

The Lord Gives Men to the Church

In Ephesians 4 there is the account where it is talking about the Lord Jesus as the Master builder and as Head over the body, He gives gifts to the church. Now He has given gifts to every believer, but there is also something mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 in which it says He gave men to the church also. People are called gifts, and I think the picture here is that you have to see the Giver behind the people. It is not talking about what we might say about a very kind person that you are God's gift to humanity. It is not like that. It is not like, "Well, what a gift." It is more like He is doing something, and so He sends somebody who is almost like a gift: "All right, I want to do something through this person." It is not to do everything for the church or fix the church, but it says in Ephesians 4 it is to equip the church. Then it goes on to say, "so that way the church can build itself up." So there is this body ministry where the church is going to build itself up and grow up into maturity in the Head. That is the Ephesians 4 concept.

Apostles

These people who are mentioned are ministering to the church, and they are actually equipping the saints. They are apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. In that

spot you think of the equipping aspect and what the apostles were doing like Paul and Barnabas who were sent out and were establishing churches. However that is equipping as well. One thing that happened with them on their trip back was that they laid hands on elders. But what they were doing was teaching the saints how to gather together in the Lord's name, so they could actually leave the saints who were now equipped to church. They were equipped to testify of Jesus without Paul staying there forever. They were equipped on their own to do church. They had what they needed so he could leave, and that is the equipping of the saints. Maybe he was used by the Lord in Philippi to begin the assembly, but he was eventually gone and that assembly continued on. When Paul wrote to the Philippians as we heard today, "I thank my God for my whole remembrance of you," but in other verses he wrote to the saints and said, "... also to the overseers and the deacons." That was an established church equipped even with leaders and deacons.

Prophets

Then there are the prophets, and the prophets will prophesy but there is an equipping that goes on also. So we might hear a prophetic word from a prophet, and if the word is the needed word at our time, maybe in a conference, you especially feel this way. Or maybe there is a certain message that you like and you say, "That was something from the Lord." But another thing that happens with them is that not only are they prophesying, but they are equipping the saints. We learn from hearing such prophetic words. We also learn how to seek the Lord's mind ourselves and how to share with one another what we feel is on the Lord's heart.

In I Corinthians 14 the prophecies that are talked about are for all of the saints. It is an experience of prophesying. I do not mean like a fortune telling or a future telling, but you are sharing something edifying and comforting and consoling. You are sharing something for the people of God that is on God's heart right now. That is something that we get equipped to do. The more we hear prophetic messages that are for us the more we understand how that works. "I want something for the Bible study this week that is from Your heart for the saints." Or I want something for this open sharing time, "What is on Your heart for Your people?" I know ten things that I could say, and they are all quite edifying, but Lord, "What is on Your heart?" So we get equipped as the church to learn to speak the words of God, not just our own words.

One of the prophets, Balaam, which is a bad example, but he did say, "I can only speak what the Lord gives me to speak." He was a terrible prophet, but he had the concept right. You get the Word of God.

Evangelists

Then we have the evangelists. I do not know if you think of evangelists as ones who equip, but it is not like you might think. It is not that an evangelist really teaches us how to evangelize. A lot of time they cannot explain it, and they will just say, "Why don't you do just what I did?" But to them it is so natural and easy. In the Scriptures it seems like an evangelist is somebody who is actually titled with it. I do not know if it is really a title, but later in Acts, in Philippi, he is called Philip the evangelist. In the beginning when he was one of the seven he was just called Philip, and he was doing whatever he was doing. And then when he was doing evangelism in a major

way among the Samaritans, he was still just called Philip, and the Lord grabs that largely-used man of God for evangelism. He takes him off to share with the Ethiopian eunuch, and he wisely shared the gospel. And then he was whisked away and finds himself settling somewhere. The next time we see him he is older and has four daughters who are all prophetesses. Paul visited him there with his crew, and Agabus the prophet was also visiting and tied himself up with Paul's belt. There is when it says that they were at Philip the evangelist's home. Now maybe it called him 'Philip the evangelist' because we know about Philip the apostle, and maybe it was just to distinguish. But either way, it does not seem like all these people like the teachers or others are walking around thinking they had to have a title in front of their name or something like that, except you might think of it with apostles. Sometimes in the letters you find, "I am Paul, and I am an apostle." And he is describing his situation. But I do not know if they always said, "Evangelist Philip" or something like that.

The evangelists equip the saints. How do they equip the saints? One thing they do is that they serve first; they do what they have, they evangelize. I think of D. L. Moody and it is almost like the world would recognize, "Okay, there is an evangelist," because so many souls were saved through him in a larger way. But we do not notice a lot of evangelists as evangelists or have that gifting, but when there is such a large measure, then you know it is somebody like Philip the evangelist or we might think of Billy Graham who is closer to our time. So these are recognized as evangelists largely used. But when the equipping happens to the rest of us saints who have the gospel, who have received Christ, who have the Evangelist living inside of us, we get swept up into what they are doing. They take us along, and as you are around someone or you are watching someone preach the good news, you sort of learn a little bit of what they do.

I read a book from James McKendrick, "Seen and Heard" and it was so good. He tells all of these stories about his evangelism experiences. It actually helped me more than anything else to know how to bring in the net. I saw how he prayed with people and what he said and I thought, "That is good. That is better than what I have been doing. Mine has been a little sloppy." I heard some of his stories and I was like, "Okay, okay, that is good." So when you are around somebody you can catch it a little bit even though you cannot always explain it.

Shepherds and Teachers

Then there are the shepherds and teachers. I have put them together, and a lot of people do this because in the Scripture in Ephesians 4:11 it has this word 'some' in front of everyone except the last two. The last two just say, 'some shepherds and teachers' or some translations say, 'pastors and teachers.' It is the same word as 'shepherd' here. But they are kind of put together. You know it is not something like proper English where you just need to stop saying 'some' at some point. In the original language there is no need for that. It is probably removed for a purpose to say that this is kind of like a combo-type of person. We might think of one as a teacher, but it seems like from the Scriptures, not just there but in other places, that the teachers have some bit of shepherding stuck in there with them, and a shepherd has some bit of teaching stuck in there with them as well. There might be a larger amount on one side or the other, but if you think how it works when someone teaches in a larger way. Let's say John is teaching a message from Solomon's Porch. So the teaching goes out, but then John is talking to someone one-on-one. Can he help that person into the experience of what he just preached? He should be able

to. That is shepherding where you are working on a smaller level and you are bringing them from where they are at to the Chief Shepherd. You are bringing them to the good Shepherd and into the experience that you were just teaching about in a larger way. So it is meant to be that both things are able to happen. You can help somebody one-on-one or in that larger way.

Now actually one of the qualifications given in one of the passages about elders is that they be apt to teach. It does not mean that it has to be somewhere like Solomon's Porch as a longer ministry of the Word. It just means you have to be able to help the saints with some good teaching. So it shows some bit of that gifting of shepherd-teaching. It should be in there somewhere, at least a little bit, and more on the level of shepherding because the exhortation keeps being to shepherd the flock, shepherd the saints. So these two go together.

Sometimes we run into someone who is especially gifted in shepherding, and we might even say, "There is a shepherd." Or in English now we would say, "There is a pastor. There is somebody that has a heart this big and is caring for a lot of people." We might run into someone who is a gift to the church, very much so in shepherding. If we run into it with someone who is teaching, we can recognize it because when they talk, I get it. Why didn't I get that before, it is so simple. I feel like that with Brother Kaung when he talks. I feel like such a dummy; why did I not ever get that? After he said it, it is like, "Wow, how was I so wrong?" And it is like that almost every message I have heard of his. But when there is that gifting with teaching, you just 'get it', but when it is shepherding, you feel like you are brought to the shepherd, and the love is there, and it almost seems natural, but we can have the wrong response. We can think that is not me; I am not very huggy. That is just not me. I do not overflow with love in that way or whatever it is. It is not meant to be like that. It is meant to be that they equip the saints just like all of these that are mentioned. There is an equipping. If there is an equipping that means the rest of us have some portion to learn from it. It might be that there is some teaching involved and our response is, "Okay, I 'get it.' I should love one another. I should go after my brother who has sinned against me. I should do this or that" But we were able to catch it. And if you know a shepherd whom you feel is a very gifted shepherd, appreciate that one. You can sometimes feel like that person has been praying for you. But catch the equipping that they are giving also, and the equipping does not need to come in a class form, similar to an evangelist. It probably comes in a way that we can catch it. So if we find a shepherd, hang out with them while they are shepherding. That is how we get equipped.

The Attribute of Listening

Maybe you are at a table at lunch time and you see somebody caring about the others at the table. They are asking questions and listening to what they are saying. We were in Toronto and I was at the lunch table. Sometimes in some settings I am naturally shy. So I was being shy, but I saw two different brothers and the way they worked the table at lunch. Now I am shy, and I know only half of these teenagers. And teenagers are actually really scary to me most of the time, especially when I first meet them. I am so scared except by God's grace. It is scary because you know you are going to say something that is not cool. You know you have got something wrong, and you probably have something in your teeth. But I saw it happen again and again with these brothers who were pretty gifted in shepherding. They were not all about themselves, but they were about those sheep at the table. It seemed natural to me probably because of their gifting.

More than likely they were among those gifted to the church. And I saw that they cared, and everybody at the table felt like they were being listened to. It was like they were being shepherded just at that moment at a meal, and it was wonderful to watch. And I felt like that equipped me a little bit. I got caught, and I thought, “Oh, that is how you work a table.” It was not like a method, but they were listening to them.

Have you ever asked somebody a question and immediately you are thinking of either the next question you are going to ask or you are thinking of something totally different? I did it when I asked what your name is, and I did not even hear you hear you say your name. That is how bad I am naturally. I asked, “What is your name? I am Geoffrey.” And they are talking, but when I walk away from the conversation, I have forgotten their name. Now I test people with this when I introduce myself. I say my name, and I get their name. I learn a little bit about them, and by the end of the conversation I say, “Do you remember my name?” That is the worst question probably for me to ask them, but you know what I am talking about. It is not always the name thing. You may ask somebody not just how they are doing, but you may even ask them something specific. Then as they begin to share, you are like, ‘uh huh, uh huh.’ We can all see it in your eyes as if you are in a whole other area. You are thinking about something else. It is rare to find someone who focuses, who is like a blank piece of paper and letting you write your story on their heart as they listen to you. It is wonderful.

I think one of the first times I had a real experience like this, I had read about it in the “Character of God’s Workmen” in which there was a chapter on listening. It is really cool. And I wanted to do it, but I never met anybody who really did it well. When I visited Richmond, I visited Brother Kaung and I started to talk, but I almost could not keep on going because he was like listening to me a hundred percent. This was back in 2004, and he was listening so much that I felt like, “Oh no, I am all exposed; it was like ‘whoa.’” But then I got used to it. He was not thinking of what to say, and he was not about to interrupt. He just let me waste his time and share, and I got everything out. He heard what I said, and I learned from that how to listen. That is how you do it. You do not think about other stuff. It was good.

That is like if someone has some gifting and is shepherding or if they have had some grace from years of trying, they know how to do some of these things. So we can learn from each other when we catch it. When someone helps you, learn from that experience how you might help someone else as well. If you have been brought out of the mud you not only get helped out of the mud, but you also learn, “Oh, that is how you bring someone out of the mud.” Maybe just sing a hymn with them sometimes. Have you ever thought about that? You do not know the answers, but you want to understand. Then it is like, let’s sing this song together. Somebody did this with me one time. They did not have an answer for me. They actually knew a little less than me in the Bible, so they could not answer my complaints or my struggle. But they said, “Let’s sing a hymn.” This younger-in-the-Lord person just brought me through; he washed my feet. Oh, that is how you shepherd. That is how you do it.

But the point I want to make is that the Ephesians 4 people are the most likely ones for us to call shepherds, besides the Lord Jesus and people who shepherd real sheep. They are very gifted with it and they are a gift to the church. Sometimes they work more than one church, but they are not sent by God to merely do the shepherding. They do shepherding in order to equip us to

shepherd. Think about our Chief Shepherd. He has a plan of how to shepherd. He is *the* Shepherd. He is our Shepherd, we shall not want. He does not replace Himself with a small shepherd guy. He just does not do that. He always remains your Shepherd. He is the only Shepherd in a sense. But another way to say it is, He is the Chief Shepherd, and He has others representing His shepherding experience. He has others doing shepherding by being under His Headship, under His Chiefness. He is the Chief Shepherd.

The Enemy comes in as a Thief

Another experience is one that if you think of the Lord being a Shepherd, we might think of John 10 and how he talks about the enemy being like a thief who comes in stealing and killing.

In John 10:11-15: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep: but he who serves for wages, and who is not the shepherd," (notice that, somebody is doing shepherding but they are not the shepherd. He is the good shepherd.) "but he who serves for wages, and who is not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not," (the sheep do not belong to this person who serves for wages.) "sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf seizes them and scatters the sheep. Now he who serves for wages flees because he serves for wages," (it just makes sense, it is not worth it to die for these. They are not my sheep so that is why he runs away.) "and is not himself concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know those who are mine, and am known of those who are mine, as the Father knows me, and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep."

I just want to bring this familiar passage to our attention of this concept that there is such a thing as serving for wages or shepherding outside of the Chief Shepherd. Even if you do not intend to do something because you get a paycheck for it or you do not intend to do it for some financial reason, once there is somebody who is having to shepherd so much, they are almost bringing the flock to themselves more than to the Chief Shepherd. They get outside of the good Shepherd's shepherding. He is the Shepherd. He is really the only one. It is true, church leaders are called to shepherd the flock as examples. It is true that we are all called to care for one another, to really shepherd one another, to go after each other, like it says in Galatians 6: "If you see someone stumbling or they are caught in something, you who are spiritual restore such a one. However, be careful that you do not get caught up in it, but if you are mature, restore them." That is shepherding. That is the thing that we are talking about.

Bear One Another's Burdens

Then it says, "Bear one another's burdens in love." That is for everybody even if you are not spiritual. "Bear one another's burdens in love." There is some calling upon all of us, but everything that we do has to be under the Chief Shepherd. I think this is how it works. When neglect happens, I think we tend to think about those who are examples or those who are very gifted, and we want them to do more. I believe the neglect in Acts 6 was that the seven were not doing their part. It is not because they did not want to; they did not even know. I think this happens to us sometimes. And really it needs to come up so we can know we should be doing something here or there. But even though exhortations come: "Make sure you are doing your part." But I think the Lord allows some neglect so He can raise some of us up to do a little bit more than what

we are doing. Even if it means each of us in this room praying for one person every week and showing that we care about one person, you could see how no one would be neglected.

Now we cannot organize it outside of our Chief Shepherd, so it cannot be that we all draw names this week. It is not a bad thing to do actually, but it is not like every week we draw names and then that is the person who you shepherd. Just remember we are not the Shepherd. If you are hired for wages we could slip a paper to you, but you may get yourself outside of the Chief Shepherd. But ask the Lord, "Lord, who can I pray for? Lord, how do you want to love this person?" As we bring somebody to the Lord's attention, I think the Holy Spirit will lead us, but we have to keep in mind that He is the Chief Shepherd. So this time I do not want to get into details of what to do except for this first spot which I think is the foundation for all shepherding, and that is He is the Chief. Everything that we do in shepherding has to come under Him if it is going to be right, if it is going to be the Psalm 23 experience and the Lord is actually doing it.

If we believe that He is the Head over the body, then we have to take a step back and say, "I have known Him who is in the third heaven who is on the throne at the right hand of God as my Shepherd. I know that, but do I know Him who is the Head of the body who surrounds me with His body as my Shepherd? Sometimes I do not know. Am I in the experience of being part of His body and He is the Shepherd? So think for a second that He is shepherding His saints, and He will send a gift on the side to equip, and He will use whatever church authority is set up to oversee. However, He is the Shepherd, and He is using His body to do most of His shepherding. He wants to work through His body. We have an individual thing happening, but He wants to use all of us to help each other with all of the neglect, with all of the needs that we have such as, "I need someone to pour out my heart to." Now can I go to the Lord and pour out my heart? Yes, but does it feel like you need somebody on the ground as well? Yes, God feels the same way. It is always like as in heaven so upon the earth. So He expects the body to do what He is doing in heaven. We cannot just have the Lord as my Shepherd in heaven; the Lord is our Shepherd on the earth as well, and it only comes through His body. It is when we as the body are joined with our Chief Shepherd that He does it, then He shepherds the saints. He cares for everyone, and we all have some part to play. We just need to bow our knees to the Head of the body and say, "Lord, I pray for Your people." And then just go from there. Maybe someone comes to mind. Maybe you start to mention some people, but then He is allowed to lead you to call someone, to sit with someone at lunch or to restore your brother who is in sin. Whatever it is, He leads you and we find this weird organization that is only Holy Spirit organized, but no one is neglected. Sometimes there needs to be a little organization, but if we all got on our knees, we would find that the Lord is our Shepherd. He is the Chief Shepherd.

The Lord Works Through the Body to do the Shepherding

I am pretty excited about this because I feel like it is almost a key to shepherding that unlocks the issue of neglect. I think many of us have experienced this. You hear the murmurings and you even feel the murmurings sometimes, and then you ask the Chief Shepherd about it. "You are the Shepherd, why is this like this?" Sometimes the Lord will say, "Go and talk to somebody about it." Sometimes the Lord will say, "Let's do this. You are My body. You are part of My body. Let's do this."

Why are these people neglected? I see them every week, and it seems like they always sit by themselves, and the Lord says, "I am their Shepherd, let's do this. You are the one that I showed, you are the one who just saw it and it is because of My Holy Spirit, so I am sending you. Let's shepherd; let's care."

It is not always this case because sometimes you do not even have the ability. You might see something, but you cannot do anything about it. But sometimes you see something and the Lord wants to use you to help with it, and that I think is pretty key. So I do not want to beat this down or say too much over and over, but just this excitement that He is the Shepherd, and we are part of Him being the shepherd. There is no one in this room who is born again who has no shepherding to do because He is the Shepherd, and you are part of His body. That is why. Because you are part of His body, and He works through the body to do most of the shepherding. Most of our shepherding needs have to happen through us. If you have been a believer for a little while, probably the next level is not that your needs get met but that you get out of yourself and begin meeting the needs of some other saints. As you do that, then you will find out that it really was not very important what I was complaining about. That is really not the big deal. And you get beside yourself. Yes, I am neglected it feels like, but who is even thinking about that when you see these saints right here and how the Lord loves these people. Suddenly the love of God through you for those saints just swallows up the death of whatever neglect somebody could say was happening to you. We have to admit you have been neglected, but is the Lord raising you up like the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep and letting you have the neglect so you can deny yourself, deny your own need of shepherding with the other saints, and just go to death and spend your attention for other people like the good Shepherd? You are not a shepherd for hire, you are not someone who is only concerned about yourself. You are concerned about the saints that are getting taken out by wolves. You are concerned with the love of God for other people because we have touched the Head who is our Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd.

Let's pray together,

Oh Lord, we just want to thank You that You have left us with no neglect. You have really left us with everything that we need all bound up in You. And Lord, I just appreciate my brothers and sisters who have shepherded me so many times in this room, and I appreciate this home, this family that my family has experienced. Lord, we just thank You for a place to rest and to remember You and to be among Your people. Lord, we thank You that You are our Chief Shepherd, and You have given us everything that we need. Lord, we bow our knee to You as the Lord, as the Head over the body. We pray for each other right now. Show us what is on Your heart. Show us who You are going after right now. Show us who needs to hear of greener pastures and to hear of the water and to be led this way. Lord, we pray that You would raise up among us many brothers and sisters to hold the hands of others spiritually and to bear one another's burdens in love. In Jesus name. Amen.