



MERIDIAN CHURCH

Not Caught Unawares **Concerning Shepherd's Visits**

by Josh King

The old King James speaks of “*that* day com[ing] upon you unawares” (Luke 21:34). In this article we’re not talking about *that* day, but we do want to discuss *a* day in reference to that day. Your shepherds want to come to your house so that you’re prepared when “the Man comes to town.” So then, we’re preparing you for a day, when a shepherd visits, so that you’re prepared for *the* day, when the Shepherd visits.

But first, a confession. It is with a mixture of joy and conviction that we share what an honor it is to shepherd this flock. The conviction is that we often feel that the quality of the sheep we’ve been entrusted with exceeds the quality of the shepherding we give. When the five year old gets the ribbon for his prize heifer, everyone knows that his father did most of the work. Our watering isn’t comparable to the increase our Father has given. God has been gracious to us poor shepherds in giving us such a flock. By His grace we want to do better. So yes, we want to improve the flock, but know it’s the shepherding that really needs refining.

In Hebrews 13:17 we find this command, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” Again, we feel you often do a better job obeying than we do keeping watch. We’re seeking to keep a better watch. I’m certain it will be met with joy. Even so, we don’t want to startle the flock. We’ve built a new sheepfold and we want you to hear what it’s like before we call you into it.

A Sheepfold

We’re calling this particular sheepfold “Shepherd’s Visits.” The hope is to have an elder meet with every member or couple personally and discuss their spiritual health at least once a year. As we under-shepherds are sheep ourselves, we will also be doing the same for one another. We do this with joy and trust you will too. These could take place in a variety of ways, but let us outline what we think will be the most typical and easiest for many of you.

Perhaps the meeting is scheduled for a weekday evening, around 8 PM. This allows parents with little ones to have time to get them in bed so that they may speak freely without distraction. While we’d prefer to have these meetings in your home, please know you don’t have to host us. A glass of water would be a kind gesture, but nothing

more is sought. These meetings are not about fattening the Shepherd, but making sure the sheep are getting fed.

If you are a single woman, an elder may visit you, either with their wife, or invite you to their home for the meeting. The point is that you will not be alone with an elder. The sheepfold should be a place of safety and integrity. We not only want to protect you from evil but avoid every appearance of it for the name of Christ.

We will pray with you, ask questions, and look to the word together. The visits are expected to last approximately one hour.

A Shepherd's Voice

We've shared these before, but here are some of the questions you can expect us to ask. These are only places we might start and this isn't a race where we're trying to make it to each marker. This is only a sampling so that you get some idea of where we may go, but every visit will be as unique as the lambs we care for as well as the shepherds themselves.

- How is it with your soul?
- What is God teaching you right now?
- How is your prayer life?
- Are you praying for other members in the body? Our missionaries, ministries and church planters?
- Are you reading and studying God's word?
- What passages are you memorizing?
- Is corporate worship refreshing?
- Are there any secret unconfessed sins that you are battling?
- Are you plugged into your life group?
- Does at least one elder know your soul well?
- Are there people in your life group that you are open and honest with?
- [To fathers] Are you leading in family worship? How?
- [To wives] How is your husband leading you?
- Which children have not yet demonstrated any fruit of salvation?
- How is your marital joy and intimacy?

What Your Shepherds Are Not Saying

In the past we've tried to shepherd in more natural and organic ways, steering and leading conversations towards these ends. The intent of these sheepfolds is not to replace these conversations or diminish their worth. We're not wanting to take away toppings from an already good pizza; we're just adding some more to make it even better.

Please know that just because one particular elder was assigned to visit with you, this doesn't mean that you cannot visit with any elder any time. When a lamb falls into a hole, he shouldn't keep quiet knowing that an annual visit is on the way. When your soul is troubled, don't hesitate to call out to us for fear of troubling us. If you ever want to pray with all the elders, we cannot object to that, as it is most Biblical (i.e. James 5:14).

Also, if you'd ever like our collective insight, or are seeking wisdom about a major decision, know you can speak with any elder or all of them.

This sheepfold isn't the only sheepfold where we can visit and where you can find safety. We're asking you to let us invite ourselves into your lives formally once a year, but know, it is a high honor and joy for us when you invite us of your own initiative. Dear flock, you are no burden. You are a blessing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let's go back to that passage in Luke and look at the fuller context in the ESV.

“But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:34–36).

We should all watch ourselves in light of that day, but we have not been left to ourselves. God gives us his church and he gives his church overseers. May we stay alert. May we pray. May we be strengthened. All this, so that on *that* day when Jesus Christ comes in His glory, we stand before Him to hear those blessedly gracious words, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:23).