

# ***Shepherding***



## **Getting Back to the Heart of Ministry**

*A Study of Acts 2:42-46*

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**Let's play a little word association game.** I'll say a word and you say the first word that comes to your mind. Ready?

Up	(down)
Stop	(go)
East	(West)
Pro Baseball Negotiations	(mumble, gripe)
Taxes	(moan)

OK, here's one more word association for you...

"The Church"... what comes to mind first?

**What do you think about when you think about the church?** Do you think about the hundreds of people you see from a distance on Sunday mornings? Or how hard it is to find a seat if your five minutes late? About the music? The programs? The pulpit ministry? The many committed leaders who keep your church moving? When I was age seven I thought of the ceiling boards...all 107 of them. Kids in my church always counted those ceiling boards to help pass the time until the service was over. I can tell by your chuckles that some of you had similar strategies for surviving church services as a kid. But now that you're an adult, I'd like you to tell me, what first comes to mind when you think of the church? It's important because it reflects something of our expectations about what the church is and does.

**I wonder what God thinks about when he thinks about the church?** What comes first to His mind? What in God's mind is at the heart of the church? From where does the life flow? Where are the headwaters of the church?

**I remember when** I was about ten years old, driving through Canada, and seeing the huge Fraser river, then we drove on & on & on, and then in what seemed the middle of nowhere, there stood a great sign on log posts that said, "Headwaters of the Fraser River". At this my dad stopped the car, snapped a picture and impressed on me how amazing it was that such a huge river could begin so small. It wasn't much. But these indeed were the source, the waters to which all the other mountain streams joined to form the river.

Where are the headwaters of true ministry we share together as a church family? When you think of the huge river that is the church all over the world from the first century to this day, and how many people and even nations have at times set out to destroy it. It's clear that there is something behind this that runs deeper than just a few platitudes. Something as great and enduring as the church doesn't just happen. With all its problems, there is undeniably something of God in it, a life that is of Him.

Today, I want us to walk with Peter from the broad river of the church visible to the headwaters, back up the river to the high mountain headwaters of the river. For I believe it is here we find the source that ought to feed all true ministry. In tracing this river, I'd like to read with you three passages...1. 1 Peter 5:1-2..."To the elders among you, I exhort you, as your fellow elder....shepherd the flock of God among you." . 2. John 21:17 Jesus said to him the third time, Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved at this and said, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you". Jesus said to him "Tend my

sheep". 3. John 10:14-15 "I am the good shepherd, and I know my own, and my own know me, even as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep". I hope you noticed the common word in all three is this idea of shepherding. Shepherding.

This morning I'd like to trace with you from the daily life of the church back up the mountain to its headwaters, to the source, the heart of ministry. We'll see First, The Centrality of Shepherding Care for the life of the church, Second, The Model of Shepherding Care, and Third, Our Part in Shepherding Care. First...

**I. The Centrality of Shepherding Care...**We see the centrality of SC in several ways in Scripture, here are three:

**1st -- We see the centrality of shepherding care in the Scriptures repeated assertions of man's need for shepherding.** The Scriptures often speak about God's people in terms of shepherds and sheep, likening His people to a flock of sheep and speaking of their need to receive shepherding care. And though we don't live very close to this kind of agrarian lifestyle today, it's not hard to understand the ideas wrapped up in the word picture. On my way to church I pass a field in which live 8 sheep, some small, some large. And one thing that stands out is that they're not very independent creatures. Not very self sufficient. They need care, feeding and protection. The Scriptures liken us to sheep.

**Jeremiah 50:6** My people have been *lost sheep*...

**Ps 23:1** The LORD [is] my shepherd; I shall not *want*.

**Ezekial 34:12** As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are *scattered*; so will I seek out my sheep...

**Ezekial 34:15** I will *feed* my flock, and I will cause them to *lie down*, saith the Lord GOD.

**Isaiah 40:11** He shall *feed* his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and *carry* them, and shall gently *lead* those that are with young.

The Word emphasize our needs for feeding, and leading, protection and rest. All of us, from the newest believer to the most experienced pastor, all of us need shepherding care. Throughout Scripture, God's heart is moved to meet this need.

**2nd -- We see the centrality of shepherding care in Peter's instructions regarding church life...**

Turn to 1 Peter 5:1-2..."To the elders among you I appeal as a fellow elder and witness of Christ's sufferings, I appeal to you, **BE SHEPHERDS OF GOD'S FLOCK THAT IS AMONG YOU**"

Now this is a very interesting statement when you realize that most of Peter's writings were addressed more to the individual Christian. He has lots to say about the individual Christian life, but he only directs a few statements to the church as an organization. Here he speaks in particular to the leaders of the church and he says "I appeal to you, **BE SHEPHERDS OF GOD'S FLOCK THAT IS AMONG YOU**"... I believe in Peter's mind, this verb "to shepherd" was the heart of ministry. He urges

those who lead the church to do one thing above all else: SHEPHERD God's SHEEP. He's not so concerned if we can run efficient programs or do amazing things. These are not the point for Peter. Shepherding care is his concern.

Now, lest you think this is a message only for leaders, notice at the end of the next verse Peter says "and so prove to be examples" to God's people. ...in other words, he wants the leaders to **model** shepherding care, and when you ask someone to model certain behaviors, it's at least in part because you want the other people to practice shepherding care toward one another. He tells the leaders to **model** shepherding care, not to be the sole suppliers of it. I believe the Shepherding he calls for is a responsibility that goes far beyond the few men who we call elders in our fellowship, and beyond the staff. This call says something to every mature Christian who loves their church and desires to build it up & see it healthy.

**2nd, We see the centrality of shepherding care in Jesus command to Peter regarding the church.**

**Where did Peter get this deep concern about shepherding care for God's people?** Why is shepherding his first concern for the church? It all goes back to an encounter Peter had with Jesus shortly after the resurrection. [Peter and several others went fishing one morning. And Jesus met them on a beach and served them breakfast. Afterwards] Jesus spoke with Peter and asked a very disturbing question, do you remember what it was? "Do you love me?". Peter of course said "Yes Lord I do" to which three times the Lord responded...what? "Feed my

sheep". If you love me, Shepherd my Sheep, Tend my Lambs, Shepherd my Lambs. Do you love me Peter? Shepherd MY SHEEP. I believe this is where Peter's soul was so deeply impressed with the essence of ministry, that ministry is providing the SHEPHERDING CARE to people who need Him. This was the heart concern of Jesus for our needs.

**Exercise:** Now, let's take a moment to explore this need the Lord says we all have. I'd like you to pretend you and I are sheep. Very bright sheep, of course, about 2.5 feet tall, all covered with fluffy wool, four legs, cute little ears. Now: what are you concerned about? What worries your woolly little head? (I'll write your ideas here on the screen). First, what are you most concerned about? ANSWER: Your next bite. Food. But not just food, as a sheep you're not inclined to think very far ahead, your life works like this (nibble nibble, nibble nibble, nibble nibble. Oh no! All gone? Oh, over there... Sheep aren't known for their foresight, in fact they have a frightening tendency to wander off looking for that next bite.

**What else worries these little fluff balls?** ....OK wolves, you've seen others become lunch, and you're terrified of that, BAD SHEPHERDS...some shepherds don't take very good care of their sheep, they don't find them enough food or water, or let them wander off and don't go bring them back. SHARP ROCKS...HOLES...SHARP STICKS...EDGES OF CANYONS...THORNS, Look at this list! You can see that, as a sheep, well, it's a jungle out there. Sheep are not very fast, not very strong, not aggressive, they have little natural protection. And they're not very smart. As a sheep, your biggest enemy is

really yourself, because as a sheep you don't think ahead very far. Spiritually speaking, we're like that. [Oh, we feel like we've got it all together and got it all down, but at those moments when something really goes wrong, we realize we're really pretty vulnerable. And Sheep need watching, care, guidance, help, nurture. And spiritually speaking, these needs are our needs! ]

That's **why** shepherding care is so important. Now, just **what is shepherding care?** What does it look like? To answer this question, turn to **John 10** where we see...

**II. Christ's Model of Shepherding Care...** Here, Jesus himself explains what shepherding care is. In this passage he reveals several of the heart concerns of the Good Shepherd. Let's look at these heart concerns of the Good Shepherd:

**#1. The Good Shepherd PROVIDES ACCESS to God's presence... V9 "I am the door, if anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture".** You are WELCOME in God's presence because of what the Good Shepherd has done for you. If you've ever found yourself accidentally locked out of a place you really needed to get in to, you know access is important. **: During the early days of the W.W.II,** before the US was drawn in, a ship loaded with hundreds of Jewish immigrants fleeing the Nazi oppression sailed to the US eastern coast and its passengers sought refuge in the US. They appealed to the State Department repeatedly to take them in, but were denied. Eventually, that shipload of people returned to Germany, and many of those people ended up in concentration camps. They did not have



access to a safe place, they did not have a place to stand. Hebrews 10 says "we can enter boldly into God's presence" because of what Christ has done". In this, He meets our most basic need. Our need of a savior and a shelter. Only He could meet this need.

## **#2. The Good Shepherd SACRIFICES HIS LIFE for His Sheep**

**V11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."**....This is HOW He made access to God possible for you and I. In Biblical times Shepherding was dangerous business. It meant coming face to face with dangerous animals in the wilderness alone. Jesus faced down his enemy Satan, alone, and defeated him, setting us free.

## **#3. The Good Shepherd LEADS His sheep...V4 "When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice."**

...Jesus leads us along in His will. Psalm 23 said "The Lord is my shepherd, He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his names sake". Jesus leads us in God's path. If you ever want a fascinating study, look at the word "way" or "path" in the OT. In ancient communities, people walked everywhere on paths and a person could often tell your intentions just by observing the paths you walked. Scripture emphasizes God's has a way or a path for us to walk on, and as His sheep we know his way. [Dr. Ron Allen Hebrew professor formerly at Western Seminary tells of visiting shepherds in Israel and noticing deep grooves coming down the face of the hillsides. He asked one shepherd about those grooves. Oh yes he said, that one is my path, my sheep know it's my path and follow me on it. Before me it was my father's

*path, and his father's before him. ] Jesus leads us along in his path.*

**#4. The Good Shepherd KNOWS His Sheep & is Known by Them...14** "I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, 15 as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep." To Know and be Known is a deep human need. If you've ever felt lonely and like nobody knows YOU or cares about you, you've felt this most basic human need which Jesus the Good Shepherd meets. I may put on a good front, but I don't survive well in isolation. I need someone to bring me in.

Oh to be known for what you ARE, not what you look like, or for what you own. I need this. And so do you. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep.

**5. The Good Shepherd gives His sheep a place to BELONG..V16** And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd. Not only does the Good Shepherd know you personally, he has a "family" for you. This relates to another basic human need that we all have, the need to be in community. You and I are part of His church, the body of Christ. A place to belong. I need this! And as imperfect as any local church is, I need to be a part of that family. The church, with all its shortcomings, is a people of God and a place to belong.

Chuck Colson tells the story of an Air Force I pilot who flew into

China during the early negotiations in the 70's. On a Sunday afternoon, he was walking in the public market and feeling quite alone. He began to whistle a familiar hymn and pretty soon, out of the crowd, someone tapped him on the shoulder and began to sing the same song in Chinese. Though they did not share the same language, they realized they shared the same shepherd. This place to belong transcends culture. The Good Shepherd gives us a place to belong.

**#6. The Good Shepherd keeps you SAFE/SECURE.** Look at verses 27 to 29..."my sheep hear my voice...and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." Again, I need this! I'm not very good at spiritual self defense, but in the Good Shepherd, I have this. Our safety, our security, our eternal hope is His responsibility and He says it is done. We are safe in Him.

**GRAPHIC-- NOW Do you see the pattern here in Jesus Ministry? Jesus the Good Shepherd meets our most basic and deepest needs.** The ones that really matter. Some of which are so deep we don't even like to let ourselves feel them. Oh, we act like we don't have any needs; I'm fine. I don't need that stuff. Who are we trying to kid anyway? These are the open wounds of life. I need someone to welcome me, to lead me, to know me, to keep me, or else I'm dying away inside. And Jesus GIVES it to us, he says I'm here, I'll be your shepherd, come to me and I will carry you.

Let's pause here for a moment and I want to ask you a question: Do you have a shepherd? Or are you trying to go it alone? Are you letting Jesus Shepherd you? Or are you still busy trying to run fast enough to stay ahead of your needs. This life is not a stroll through Nordstrom's or Disneyland. It's a veil of tears, the Scriptures say, and we all will face this in time, without a shepherd, we have no place to stand.

Jesus is the model of shepherding care, He is the source. Now briefly, let's explore **our** part in shepherding care. We have a part in this As we saw in I Peter 5, he commands leaders to show SC so that ideally, the all will practice it toward one another. When we do, we're really connecting our ministry to the headwaters of all ministry.

### **III. Our Part in Shepherding Care**

Let me suggest two practical steps for us today in following his lead...

#### **1. Make it your goal to give the shepherding care of Jesus to those around you...**

**A. In the church...**Shepherding care is the basic lifeblood of a church. Our church is as healthy as our care quotient, or as unhealthy as our lack of it. Over and over again I have seen the power of this kind of steady ongoing care to help people overcome the worst of trials, to turn hearts that have become dry and apathetic.

**GRAPHIC Table** As I look through the list of ways Jesus cares

for His own, I see ample opportunity for His heart concerns to drive our hearts as well, and to drive our ministry to one another. **He** provides access, we remind one another to draw near to the God who welcomes us because of Christ. **He** leads his sheep, we call one another to look to him for our direction. **He** sacrificed his life, we sacrifice for one another. **He** gives a place to belong, we ARE that place to belong.

The key here, I think, is not to get burdened down thinking that you alone have to PROVIDE these things from within yourself. Rather, in ministry, we're just bringing one another back to the Good Shepherd. He's the source, not us. We just deliver his gifts.

You can do this many settings, formal or informal--at the bus stop, at work, even at church sometimes: For you may mean joining a small group, a contact group, finding a prayer partner to pray regularly with, starting a lunchtime fellowship or prayer group at work. Find some way to have contact with people and actively care for them.

**B. Outside the church...** there is no shortage of hurting people in need shepherding care. Notice how these first two items on the list deal with evangelism. This is the gospel right here: The sacrifice of Jesus and the access to God that is available. Scripture says Jesus loved us "While we were yet sinners...." He expressed shepherding care for us while we were lost. Would to God that each of us would demonstrate the shepherding care of Jesus in our world. Shepherding Care can have the most profound effect in showing others of the reality

of Christ. Jesus got in trouble with the religious set for the needy people he hung around with. May it be so of us as well.

There is a small church in our area that has taken special effort to reach out to a public elementary school nearby. They invited the principle and teachers to present a seminar on how Christian parents can help the schools, and to reason together of ways the church and the school can work together. The senior pastor has joined and led the PTA. Mom's in Touch fellowship has reached out to staff with flowers and notes of encouragement. This church is intentionally showing it's capacity for shepherding care to the school and its staff. So recently, when a teacher with two babies was diagnosed with cancer, it was only natural that that church arranged a rotation of house cleaning for the summer. The pastor worked within the school community to help raise funds to help this family in extreme need. Y'know, that school staff has a different view now of this little church than it had four years ago. What could have been a relationship of mistrust has been changed into one of trust and respect. Shepherding care can do that.

**2. GRAPHIC -- And one other step for us today: Avoid Cheap Substitutes...**there are many other things that tend to displace the heart of ministry and choke off our shepherding care. Especially in a big growing church I think we can be vulnerable to these distractions pulling us off course. Here are a few cheap substitutes I think we should beware...

**Conclusion: In many ways our church is at its peak right now.**

Budget is up, attendance up, we'll be building soon. Yet the Word says "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall". And I have seen churches much larger than this grow cold and wither away in a very short time.

We need to value the right things in ministry, not these decoys. We need to make it our habit continually to revisit the source of ministry, the heart of the Good Shepherd. It's from these headwaters of ministry that we learn what we are to be and to do and to value and to become. I pray that in three years we will not be known as the church with the biggest new building, or the busiest programs, but the church where the heart of the shepherd and the heart of the church are one. Let's pray.

*Basic Prayer: Lord, we want to be a people after your own heart. A place where people encounter your shepherding care wherever they turn. We would be channels through which you touch and heal. Amen.*

## John 10

1 ¶ "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber;

2 but he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

3 To him the gatekeeper opens; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

**4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.**

5 A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

6 This figure Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

7 So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not heed them.

**9 I am the door; if any one enters by me, he be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.**

**10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.**

**11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**

12 He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

13 He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep.

**14 I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know**



me,

**15 as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.**

16 And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.

17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again.

18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father."

19 ¶ There was again a division among the Jews because of these words.

20 Many of them said, "He has a demon, and he is mad; why listen to him?"

21 Others said, "These are not the sayings of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

22 ¶ It was the feast of the Dedication at Jerusalem;

23 it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon.

24 So the Jews gathered round him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me;

26 but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep.

**27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me;**

**28 and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.**

29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

30 I and the Father are one."

31 The Jews took up stones again to stone him.

32 Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of these do you stone me?"

33 The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we stone you but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God."

34 Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'?"

35 If he called them gods to whom the word of God came (and scripture cannot be broken),

36 do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?"

37 If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me;

38 but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."

39 ¶ Again they tried to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands.

40 He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John at first baptized, and there he remained.

41 And many came to him; and they said, "John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true."

42 And many believed in him there.



We begin our journey at the broad river of ministry, the church at large, Peter looks out and thinks of the church, in I Peter 5:1-2 and as he surveys the great body of believers at large, he turns to its leaders and points them up the mountain range and says, "You who lead the church, I call on you always to draw from that river which is her source, and he points them back to the heart of ministry. Read the first two verses with me.

#### **4th -- Because Peter sets Shepherding Care up as model for the members to follow**

**When Peter thought about the health of the churches, he thought primarily about this need that** people have, to be shepherded, to receive shepherding care into their lives. In fact, if you survey all of Peter's writings, he only says 2 major messages directly TO the church. To the people at large he says, "Love one another", to the leaders he says "Model Shepherding Care toward God's people". Now if you were only going to say 2 things to your loved ones, you'd say what matters, why does Peter choose to talk about shepherding? I believe in this word we see Peter giving us a glimpse of the stream, pure and clear and cool and refreshing, stream of living water, coming down the hill side, when Peter looks at the church, he turns to those who lead the church and says, don't forget to shepherd God's sheep, God's people.

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. As they toiled in the boat without success, a man called them from the shore and told them to drop their nets on the other side, they did and caught a net full, a boat full and realized it was Jesus. They went ashore and found a most curious scene, Jesus had cooked breakfast for them over a fire on the beach. Now I love barbecue food, and it doesn't get much better than food cooked over an open fire, especially when you've been out and gotten wet and tired and hungry. And can you picture coming ashore to this intimate breakfast with the crucified and risen Son of God? Come in, have breakfast with me. And in this quiet personal setting on the beach Jesus speaks with Peter, who had denied Him three times while on the Cross, and three times Jesus asks Peter, do you love me? And Peter says yes, to which Jesus responds:

(Like the far side cartoon where two deer are out in the woods and one has a bulls-eye right on his side, and his friend looks at him and says "bummer of a birthmark, Fred".)

For when Jesus told Peter to shepherd HIS SHEEP, no doubt Peter's mind fed with Jesus profound and deep discussion of His own ministry to His people. It's here that I believe we draw the pattern for all of our ministry, it is to this, I believe, that Peter points church leaders when he calls them to shepherd the flock of God among them.

Here we find the headwaters of all ministry that is truly ministry.

, all our efforts are just show unless they flow from their source in Christ. And as we stand at those headwaters, I believe we understand much better what we are to be and to do and to value together as God's children

[And as he leads, He is a "gentle shepherd" -- he is not constantly striking us with a stick, he leads to quiet peaceful fruitful places. Sometimes we do not recognize them as such, sometimes we resist, sometimes we forego the peace he wishes to give us.]

[: Did you read the story recently of 4 year old Danny Fink, who was lost for two days and nights in the wilds of New Mexico, with only his red jacket to keep him warm in the snow and bone chilling winds up to 70 MPH. Eventually, a tracker helped searchers find the little boy. Spiritually speaking, that's me

without Jesus. I'm out there in the cold. I need this! I don't know where I'm going! Without a shepherd, I get lost, I fall in a holes and over cliffs. I go wandering after other grass.] Jesus leads his sheep.