

# The Role of a Shepherd

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About three weeks ago today, Rick was giving a sermon in Prosser. In his usual crisp and clear manner, he was going along just fine until he got towards the end of the sermon. Everyone there started to notice things going on, and it escalated a bit, and Rick finally just had to wind up and stop. We were concerned. Stuart Fricke had the presence of mind to do a few motor skill tests to see if something was going on. Everything physically was okay, but we knew it was something deeper, so we kind of ganged up on him and convinced him to go to the Emergency Department in Prosser.

I don't know about you, but we've been in E.R.'s plenty of times (not for ourselves, but for others). With the hustle and bustle of the E.R, I knew I needed to anoint Rick. We didn't have time to do it before we left the meeting hall. I was thinking how I was going to do this. At one point, they wheeled him out to do a CAT Scan. There was a little break in there, so I anointed him. In that prayer, I kind of reasoned with God. I gave Him reasons for why God should intervene and help. I just said that we depend on Rick and we need Rick. So that was part of my prayer.

The only reason I bring that up, and I hope I didn't embarrass the Railstons, but what does that mean? My title today is:

## The Role of a Shepherd

If you look at the Bible definition of shepherd, you will discover that there are two shepherds in our lives. One is spiritual and the other is physical. I would like to discuss those two today.

The first one I will talk about is the spiritual shepherd. Please turn to 1 Peter 2. I'll try not to go back and forth too much regarding these two shepherds. I'm not a complicated speaker. You will see very quickly where I'm going. This following scripture makes an interesting statement.

**1 Peter 2:25.** *For you were like sheep going astray ... (NKJV)*

When you think about that for a minute, we were all sheep going astray at one point. However, I think we all realize that if we're not careful, we can sometimes backslide and go astray again. You have to ask yourself: Astray from what? Well just back up a bit to the beginning verses of 1 Peter 2. I'll briefly skip through some of the things leading up to verse 25. This is from the NLT. It makes it a bit clearer.

**1 Peter 2:1.** *So get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech. (NLT)*

It's talking about behavior.

*2) Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, (NLT)*

Verse 2 says we should crave spiritual food. Verse 4 talks about Christ being the living cornerstone of the temple.

*4) You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor. (NLT)*

In verse 5 tell us that we become the living stones, the building blocks of that spiritual temple.

*5) And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. (NLT)*

Verse 8 says that He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall. They stumble because they do not obey God's word. So they meet the fate that was planned for them.

*8) And, He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they do not obey God's word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them. (NLT)*

In other words, they are reaping the results of their behavior.

*9) But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.  
10) "Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy." (NLT)*

Once we were not a people, but now we are God's people. We are a spiritual body that belongs to Christ.

*11) Dear friends, I warn you as "temporary residents and foreigners" to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. (NLT)*

We know that Satan never sleeps. He never rests. He's always there. Those worldly desires affect all of us.

We get bombarded by that every day on T.V, etc. In an election year, we try to avoid the television.

*12) Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world. (NLT)*

This verse says to be careful how you live. People see that; your unbelieving neighbors see that. At one point, it indicates that prophetically, at some point, people will give God honor because of your behavior. They will recognize what was driving you and motivating you in the way you conducted yourself in your life.

*17) Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king. (NLT)*

Here it says to respect everyone, love your brothers and sisters.

*19) For God is pleased when, conscious of his will, you patiently endure unjust treatment. (NLT)*

God is pleased with you when you do what you know is right and you patiently endure unfair treatment, because that happens to all of us. We hear about that from time to time.

*20) Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you. (NLT)*

If we suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is also pleased with that, because He knows why we are doing that.

*21) For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps. (NLT)*

He never sinned. He never deceived anyone.

*23) He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. (NLT)*

He did not seek revenge. That's very unlike our own human nature. I think we've all been there. We get our feelings hurt. We get beat up (maybe not physically) but emotionally and psychologically, and we want to react to that. We want to hit back. Christ didn't do that.

*24) He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed. (NLT)*

The point there is that we don't want to go astray from God. We don't want to go astray from those things of Jesus Christ. That's what we have. That's what we should be building our life around. As a reference scripture, turn to 1 John 1.

**1 John 2:1.** *My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. (NLT)*

So if we do mess up and want to get back on track, we are looking to our shepherd, Jesus Christ. Now to the last part of 1 Peter 2:25.

**1 Peter 2:25.** *... but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (NLT)*

We have two words there: "shepherd;" Strong's says it is used eighteen times in the New Testament.

The second word is "overseer;" in the Greek, that is "episkopos." It's where we get the word Episcopalian. It means *superintendent, bishop, overseer*. Some translate that as *guardian*. Strong's says that is used five times.

The point is that Jesus Christ is your spiritual shepherd. He is your spiritual pastor, your spiritual superintendent, spiritual bishop and spiritual overseer. If He is not, we need to return to Him. If you don't have Jesus Christ as your pastor, you need to return to Him. If you don't have Jesus Christ as your spiritual bishop, your superintendent, your overseer, you need to return to Him. If any of us are in those situations, we need to turn back to Him.

I wanted to start out with emphasis on our chief shepherd, Jesus Christ. We've had a tendency in the past to de-emphasize Christ. We thought, "Oh no, if you say Jesus all the time, you're just being protestant." We wanted to avoid that. The consequence of that was we place far too much emphasis on human beings. Some people out there may be thinking, "Oh no, he's going to re-plow old ground again." I don't really plan to do that. You have to realize that us people that have been around for a very long time have some baggage. We really do. It has to do with the fact that we haven't looked to our spiritual shepherd enough. We haven't focused on Him. I'm going to talk about that as we go through the message.

We even have friends that are second generation, third generation and fourth generation. They have some baggage because they grew up in the church. That has the tendency to carry through.

When we place too much emphasis on human beings, those physical shepherds that we have (we'll talk about that as we go along), but this is a very short step into idolatry. Unfortunately, far too many of us fell into that.

On the other hand, we want to understand what the role is for the human beings as they fulfill their responsibilities in their roles as physical shepherds, pastors and overseers. There is a place for these physical shepherds. It's designed by God to be in that structure in the church.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 1. You've probably read this many times, but there is a place in that structure.

**2 Corinthians 1:23.** *Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth. (KJV)*

This is in regard to the incestuous relationship that Paul had to deal with. He needed to strongly correct the Corinthian church.

*24) Not for that we [physical leaders] have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith you stand. (KJV)*

Not faith in your helpers, which we'll talk about later. So we have a term there, "helpers of your joy." Some translations say "fellow laborers, workers with you, for your joy ...". Paul understood very clearly that this was his role. He was an apostle, but that was his role. He was a helper. He was a laborer, a worker under the chief shepherd, Jesus Christ. We know that God uses human instruments as laborers and workers, and that's what our chief shepherd wants.

Please turn to Matthew 9.

**Matthew 9:35.** *Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages of that area, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness.*

*36) When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (NLT)*

The King James says *they were weary*. They were worn out, like a sheep without a shepherd. We can look at that two ways. He's talking about the people then. He saw them in a kind of spiritual wilderness. They were confused and lost. They had bad spiritual leaders. The spiritual leaders actually ran the nation at that point in history along with the Romans, unfortunately.

Also, if you looked at that from today's point of view, we've had brethren that have been scattered, disheartened, discouraged, depressed and confused because of bad leaders. I won't belabor that again. The point here is that Christ recognized the problem and He had compassion on that. Then he goes on with the solution. He intended to provide physical helpers.

*37) He said to his disciples, "The [spiritual] harvest is great, but the workers are few. (NLT)*

These helpers, these laborers and workers are few.

*38) So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.” (NLT)*

The spiritual fields are the church, God’s people down through history.

So Christ says there is a place and a need for helpers. There is a place for these laborers. He wants people who work. That’s what He wants; not those who sit around being admired and worshipped, revered and honored. He is looking for people to be laborers and workers helping other people. He is looking for good men and women, like the Marines, looking for a few good men (or women).

He’s not only looking for that spiritual harvest in the church. God and Christ are always looking to the future. All these things we talked about, our behaviors and conduct that people see could influence our society that we operate and function in later, whenever God works out His plan, however He is going to do that. So our chief shepherd, Jesus Christ, is looking for helpers to get out there and work, not to take the place of God in people’s lives, not to have dominion over people’s faith, as Paul said, but people who want to work for God and Christ. He does not want those who rule over and exercise dominion over people’s lives.

Unfortunately, in the past, we experienced a ministry that liked to pattern themselves after the Levitical priesthood. We can see in the book of Hebrews that that has been done away. That has been changed. We have a high priest now. We have a chief shepherd and we have a spiritual pastor, all of that. In the Old Testament, under that system, people took their issues to the priest. They made a decree, a judgment, and if you didn’t follow that, it was the same as going against God. Those were the rules that society lived in. They were acting against God.

What happened was that a lot of those in the church viewed the ministry as the Levitical priesthood. Sometimes the ministers viewed themselves as a Levitical priest. He would go into areas sometimes that he never should go into. He would make decrees and judgments in areas where he should have allowed people to exercise personal responsibility instead of making all the decisions for them. He should have pointed people to their true bishop, their true shepherd and pastor, Jesus Christ. That’s what they should have done.

I heard of an example just recently where a minister actually flew into a rage because somebody moved and didn’t check with him. There are similar things we can talk about, but we don’t want to go there. The point is that Jesus Christ wants physical helpers and laborers, and He doesn’t want them acting like that.

In that system in the recent past, they did literally have dominion over people's lives. Again, Hebrews shows that this has been done away with. Jesus Christ, our chief shepherd, does not want the ministry in the New Testament to be like that.

We can appreciate the physical helpers that we have, but not looking for people to have dominion over our faith. We don't want those bad ministers, those bad leaders. There are people out there even today that, if you allow them, they will have dominion over your life. They want that. What they really want is to have dominion over your tithes and offerings, your attendance on the roles, etc.

A mature Christian will take personal responsibility. They will recognize what's going on there and avoid that. They will avoid those ministers.

Again, Christ is looking for laborers to get out there and do things for people, to be involved in their lives, but not take His place. They are to work for God and Jesus Christ. There is a place for physical helpers and workers. The chief shepherd set up that system. It shows that in Ephesians 4.

***Ephesians 4:11. And He [Christ] Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, (NKJV)***

It's the same Greek word for "shepherd," *a physical shepherd, helper, laborer and worker*. They are never to take the place of the chief shepherd, Jesus Christ. At best, the minister is an under shepherd. He appointed some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and teachers. What are they supposed to be doing? They are not to be dominating people's lives.

*12) for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry [service, serving, what a physical helper does] for the edifying [building up] of the body of Christ,  
13) till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;  
(NKJV)*

That's the stature of the chief shepherd and our spiritual pastor. That is the stature we are striving for.

*14) that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine ... (NKJV)*

If you're going to be a true helper and serve under Christ, you will help maintain stability in God's word. That is what a true minister should be doing, not coming up with all sorts of different things, big projects or whatever it may be.

*14b) ... by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,  
(NKJV)*

By the way, good ministers can actually help. People recognize the sleight of hand, the craftiness, the cunning and trickery of men. Another function of a physical helper is to protect the flock.

We have to look past all of that. We have to look at the fruit. We need to be careful and not believe everything we hear and not fall for everything. I don't know about you, when I want to buy something, I'll go to good old Amazon and I look at the reviews. Sometimes I will look at those for some time before I actually decide to buy something. Of course, some of those are bogus. There are actually people out there who get paid for doing reviews. Whatever it is, people will find a way to make a dime off of it. Anyway, I will check on that. You just have to protect yourself and investigate.

It's the same with spiritual things. We need to investigate and see whether people's claims are true or not. There are an awful lot of claims out there, in the world and in the church.

The point here is to get past the trickery, the rhetoric, the religious catch phrases, and sometimes past traditions. We must get past those things. We must get down to what the Bible really says and what does God really expect of us? What does the true shepherd expect of us? That's what we're shooting for. In verse 15, it tells us what a true physical shepherd does. It helps with all of this.

*15) but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— (NKJV)*

It's our spiritual shepherd and pastor, Jesus Christ.

*16) from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (NKJV)*

That is the purpose of a true helper. He will speak the truth in love, help people to grow and point them to the true head of the church. He gives the head of the church the respect and honor that He needs as the shepherd of the church. He is the head of the church. There are no other heads there.

We should never allow anyone, whether living or dead, to get between our relationship with our spiritual pastor and our chief shepherd. Again, the true physical servants of God are going to try to help the body to be edified. They will want to build up the body that it will be fitly joined together.

By the same token, sometimes physical people cause divisions in the body. These people will set up barriers, sometimes set up rules, regulations and policies that actually have the effect of causing division and disunity. We have seen that happen historically.



Christ does allow positions for physical bishops and overseers. We need them and we appreciate them, especially when they act according to what God's word says.

Some people are impressed by religious leaders with titles and position, but the last thing that the chief shepherd wants is people with titles and position not doing what He wants. That is totally illogical. We don't need that at all. That doesn't contribute to the building of the body. It actually tears it down. So we need helpers, workers and laborers like Christ talked about, those without titles that will do what He wants done.

Turn to Acts 20. Paul shows some of the characteristics of what a physical overseer or bishop should be when they are chosen. He talks about the qualities and fruits we should be looking for. Remember that here in Acts 20, Paul is talking to a group of elders in Ephesus. He is leaving and going his way, and it gets very emotional. They were all sorry about it and fell on his neck and kissed him. Paul cared deeply for these men. He tells the elders the following in verse 28:

**Acts 20:28.** *Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers ... (NKJV)*

Not to take the place of the chief Overseer, Jesus Christ, but to be helpers, laborers and workers. Paul tells them that they have a responsibility as overseers. However, notice the limitations he puts on it.

**28b)** *... to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (NKJV)*

In other words, you belong to Jesus Christ. If any man, whomever he is, tries to claim that God's people are his people, that's Biblically incorrect. That is not accurate.

We've done some baptisms in Pacific Church of God, but we tell each and every one of them (and this is the policy we have), that you're not baptized into any organization. You're not baptized into Pacific or otherwise. You're baptized into the body of Jesus Christ, a spiritual organism. Furthermore, we're thankful to have the opportunity and consider it a privilege to do this service for you, but it is directed by Jesus Christ. We are also pleased if you attend with us, but you're not baptized into us, you don't belong to us, and you don't belong to any denomination, but the body of Christ. If you attend somewhere else, that's your business. We're available to help you, no matter what or where you go. You're not ours. It's not like we baptize someone into our congregation. That's false. These members don't belong to us. They don't belong to any individual. They do not belong to a pastor general. They do not belong to a presiding president. They do not belong to a council of elders. None of that. These individuals are God's through Christ. They have been purchased through His own blood. Sometimes some of us get the opportunity to be helpers and workers among these folks and help them out.

The whole point again when we look at those scriptures, they say we are purchased by Jesus Christ and don't belong to anyone else. If someone tries to lump you in with being an overseer, that's just not Biblical. That is not correct.

Okay, now we've seen a few things about physical helpers, laborers, ministers, etc., and what they're supposed to be doing. Let's go back to Acts 20:28. I'd like to reread that.

**Acts 20:28.** *Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (NKJV)*

The Greek word here for "shepherd" means *to tend, to take care of, like a shepherd.*

I like the Amplified version of this.

**Acts 20:28.** *Take care and be on guard for yourselves and the whole flock over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you bishops and guardians, to shepherd (tend and feed and guide) the church of the Lord or of God which He obtained for Himself [buying it and saving it for Himself] with His own blood. (AMPC)*

It says, "to tend and feed and guide," not to dominate over or rule over. Even the New Living says that.

**Acts 20:28.** *"So guard yourselves and God's people. Feed and shepherd God's flock—his church, purchased with his own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as leaders. (NLT)*

It says to feed and shepherd God's flock. Either translation is correct in its intent.

So the first thing a helper must do is feed the flock. That means to feed the word of God, the doctrine of God, all the good things of God. That's what it means; not to teach theories. We want to be sure that it's the word of God.

A good shepherd guides the flock to good pastures, to feed on good spiritual food and drink spiritual water.

In Matthew 7, where it talked about knowing ministers, physical helpers, and shepherds by their fruits, it doesn't mean that they're perfect. We certainly all realize that. If you're looking for someone perfect, you're never going to find them. What that is referring to is, are they consistent. Christ used the analogy there of a good tree bearing good fruit, and a bad tree bearing bad fruit. A good tree consistently bears good fruit, and a bad tree will consistently bear bad fruit. It doesn't mean that you're going to find perfect human beings, because you're not. You're looking for consistency. Does the individual point you to your chief shepherd, to your spiritual pasture? Does he teach and preach the word of God? That's the fruit you're looking for, and being consistent in that.

Turn back to Genesis 29. There is an interesting analogy of a shepherd. It's kind of tucked away back in Genesis 29

**Genesis 29:7.** *Then he said, "Look, it is still high day; it is not time for the cattle to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go and feed them." (NKJV)*

This is an analogy of a shepherd in the Old Testament.

*8) But they said, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and they have rolled the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep." (NKJV)*

The Amplified says:

**Genesis 29:7.** *He said, The sun is still high; it is a long time yet before the flocks need be gathered [in their folds]. [Why not] water the sheep and return them to their pasture?*

*8) But they said, We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together; then [the shepherds] roll the stone from the well's mouth and we water the sheep. (AMPC)*

That's a spiritual analogy and an image for today. We gather every Sabbath and every holy day. We have church services. The physical shepherds as well as the laborers and workers roll away the stone so we can drink of God's spiritual water. We don't provide the spiritual water and food, but we guide people to the well and we roll away the stone. We teach and preach what the Bible says. That's what we should be doing.

Again, there's a place for physical helpers, but the focus should always be on the source of that spiritual food and water, on the chief shepherd, Jesus Christ. We're here today. The stone is rolled away, and you're eating, drinking and chewing on what we're talking about, but your chief shepherd provides that through His servants, through physical human beings.

It's a long drive up here. Marie and I are really getting old. I wouldn't come up here if I didn't need to, even though I love everybody here. It's wearing us out as we get older. Physical human beings just wear out. We run down.

So the spiritual shepherd is providing the spiritual food. He is using us to do it. We are allowing God to use us to do it. In fact, we are thankful for the opportunity to do it. During the sermonettes and sermons, He rolls away the stone. There's a "but" in there. But is that once a week? How about on your own? Do you study during the week? To whom do you turn to roll away the stone during the week? You turn to that chief shepherd, your spiritual pastor, Jesus Christ. He's there 24/7, 365 days a year. He rolls away the stone. So the point is that you don't always need a physical shepherd to roll away the stone. They have limits. That's all they can do. They can only do a little bit when you think about it. That can be hard for us, but that's all we can do.

When you think about physical ministers, elders and other laborers, we come and go. That's just the way it is. We've known some really good ministers, elders, deacons, and we've know some that are not so good. We've had a few of them try to insert themselves between us and our spiritual shepherd. That's impossible, but they tried. They wanted to be the chief shepherds in your life. We've seen that. It happened once, but it won't happen again, not here anyway.

Whenever you dig into that spiritual well of God's word, you have a spiritual shepherd who is more than able to roll that stone away, any time you want. He can give us understanding anytime and anywhere. It doesn't matter what your conditions are.

Have you ever tried to get a hold of a minister? You needed him in the middle of the night? Maybe he doesn't answer the phone. Maybe he's sick or tired. Maybe he's on vacation. Maybe he's a hireling and got fired and left. You can't contact him.

Do you see the point there? No matter how good the intentions are of a human, physical shepherd, minister, elder, or whatever he is, no matter what his intentions and dedication are, he's still a human being. He is still fallible. He's not always going to be there no matter how much you appreciate or care for him, he's just not going to be there.

I ran across a term recently that comes from Latin. The term is "memento mori." It means: *Remember, you will die.* That's not grim. It's just a fact. There are scriptures that tell us that, that all men die once.

Once again, you have a spiritual shepherd. You have a relationship with the one who can roll away that stone whenever you dig into God's word, when you pray or study with no physical helpers there. You don't need to call a minister. You might ask him a question at some point, but he may not be there immediately to respond to your question. We can always get on our knees, we can open our Bible and ask God a question. It's amazing how many times the help comes. It's just amazing.

I hope we see the difference there, because there are dozens of people out there who want to be your chief shepherd. Some are competing and even fighting for that opportunity. They're trying to convince you, and if you're not alert, far too many brethren still fall for that. They're locked in. There are individuals out there, physical shepherds, ministers, that are trying to convince people that you can't exist without them. You can't understand truth without them. You can't understand the word of God without them. You can't achieve salvation without them. You'll never be in a place of safety without them. That is not accurate. That's not Biblical. That's not true. It is totally incorrect. That is not what scripture says.

Men can be helpers. They should be, but they should say and teach based on the Bible. That's what we should be doing. It better be good spiritual food and it better be what the chief shepherd, Jesus Christ wants us to say, and we had better keep our eyes focused on Him. He can roll away that stone any time. Other ministers may be out

there doing ... you don't know what. You have contact with Christ all the time, any time. All you need to do is ask Him to roll away the stone and drink of God's word. That's all we have to do.

In Acts 20 it talks about the second thing a physical helper does, and that is to protect the flock. Paul does that here very lovingly, affectionately and with great emotion.

**Acts 20:29.** *For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.*

*30) Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. (NKJV)*

You can almost see and feel Paul's emotion here. He's looking these men in the eyes. He cares deeply about them. He's giving them a reality check. Today we would say, "Boys and girls, this is the way it really is." He's telling them that their problem is that they're human. Satan is going to get some of them. He is warning them that if they let down, if they forget who their chief shepherd is, if they forget who their real spiritual pastor is and stray from Him, like we saw in Peter, they are in danger.

*31) Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. (NKJV)*

I would think that a good minister would want to follow that example, to warn day and night with tears when someone really needs that. In principle, this warning is for us too. We must be deeply rooted and grounded in God's word. If we're not focused on God's word, but focused on men and the ideas of men, and focused on titles instead of the chief shepherd, we're going to get into trouble every time, without fail. We are human beings. That's what Paul is telling these men.

Let's say there's no physical helper there. If people want to depend on men, are you able to discern when someone is telling you something that is against the scriptures? I hope we can. We need to be well grounded and alert all the time. It doesn't matter if the church taught something for umpteen years, we need to follow what the Bible says. That's what we need to be doing. That's what physical shepherds should be leading and guiding us to do. They must feed and protect the flock and warn people in a compassionate way, and do it in a Biblical fashion. Psalms 23 is one of the best loved Psalms in the Bible, six short verses. They are full of meaning in the context of what we're talking about.

**Psalm 23:1.** *The LORD is my shepherd ... (NIV)*

No human hand there. I like this quote from a commentator. I can't recall the source right now. It says:

Despite its world-wide popularity, this Psalm is not for everyone. It applies only to those who are entitled to say, "The Lord is my shepherd."

*1b) ... I lack nothing.*

*2) He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,  
(NIV)*

This shepherd feeds us in green abundant pastures and leads us beside still waters. Can we all say that? Is that true about us? If we are not looking to that chief shepherd, our spiritual pastor, we're not going to find that quietness, that good food, and that wonderful clear and clean spiritual water for us to drink. Those quiet waters mean there is no turbulence.

That's not true in the world we live in today. We live in such a topsy turvy world. The world is going nuts. It's messed up beyond all recognition. Especially when we have the leadership we have now. It's an election year and we have very poor candidates. We have a president that's worried about his legacy. What is that legacy going to be? I can think of two things. The first one is that we don't know our enemies, and if we do, we don't want to say so. The second thing is we don't know which bathroom to use. It seems that the whole world is acting like idiots.

We desperately need that relationship with the chief shepherd, with God the Father and Jesus Christ. We need to follow wherever He leads. We need those still waters to calm us spiritually, and we need to drink of the still waters of God's word.

Satan wants people on edge all the time. He wants us anxious all of the time. If we're not very careful, we can go there. So we need the chief shepherd to lead us beside those quiet and calm waters more than ever. Green pastures and quiet waters pictures a spiritual tranquility and calmness and a rest that we cannot get on our own.

*3) he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.  
(NIV)*

John 10 tells us that Christ leads and guides His sheep because they know His voice. Do we listen and respond to that voice all the time like we should?

*4) Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (NIV)*

That rod represents authority, of course. It's also used as a club to protect the flock. The staff has a hook on the end of it to pull a sheep out of a hole or crevice. That symbolism shouldn't be lost on us. Sometimes we need to be pulled out of something too.

*5) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies ... (NIV)*

Enemies are always watching the sheep. The shepherd is there to protect and deliver them.

*5b) ... You anoint my head with oil ... (NIV)*

That's interesting because kings were anointed and other people were anointed. It's actually symbolic of a sense of worth. God loves and cares for us. He has mercifully called us. We are worth everything to our chief shepherd.

*5 continued) ... my cup overflows.*

*6) Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (NIV)*

Again, as you appreciate your physical helpers, remember always that you have that spiritual chief shepherd. He is always there when the enemy comes. That's a good part of what this Psalm is talking about.

Thinking back to John, chapter 10, the chief shepherd is always there when a thief comes knocking at your door. A physical shepherd cannot always be there when you need them.

The point again is that the chief shepherd, Jesus Christ and God the Father are always there. They are your shepherds and your bishop and that is who you look to. Again, we may appreciate those physical helpers, love them and esteem them for what they do, but never, never put them in the place of that chief shepherd, of your spiritual pastor, your real bishop, Jesus Christ.

We used to put a lot of emphasis on a place of safety, but in the days ahead, where is your greatest safety going to be? It's going to be in a solid relationship with that chief shepherd, Jesus Christ. If you don't have a relationship with Jesus Christ, with that chief shepherd, to guide and lead and protect you, where are you going to hide? There's no place to hide. There's no place on this earth that's going to be safe for you. It's just not there. There's no place on this earth where you're going to be nourished and have a living, dynamic relationship with your chief shepherd. We have to focus on that spiritual shepherd, that pastor.

Satan is pretty effective in getting people focused on the details, on how everything is going to fall into place. People argue about all those details. Some people claim they have the answers to all of this, but then they don't practice the love which is the basis of everything. They're not following that chief shepherd. Brethren, we're going to be judged by the words of Christ. We're going to stand before His judgment seat, and that's why He has to be the focal point of your life, not people and what people say, it's what His words say. That is what we must base our lives on.

***Hebrews 13:20.*** *Now may the God of peace—who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, and ratified an eternal covenant with his blood—*

*21) may he equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever! Amen. (NLT)*

That's why we have our eyes on God. We are awaiting the return of Jesus Christ. We're looking forward to seeing the king of kings. We're looking forward to seeing the bridegroom. That's where I should be, because He is the great shepherd. He's the one we should be looking to, not someone else. He is our high priest and He should be the biggest part of our life.

Turn to Revelation, chapter 7. Chapter 6 starts talking about the seal and it goes on to the sixth seal at the end of chapter 6. In verse 7, it has kind of an inset that talks about sealing Israel, the church, and sealing physical and spiritual Israel in a sense. In verse 9, it talks about a multitude from the great tribulation.

***Revelation 7:13.*** *Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?"*

*14) And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

*15) Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them.*

*16) They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; (NKJV)*

Notice verse 17.

*17) for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (NKJV)*

That really nails it regarding who we should be looking to. There is no human being that will do that. It's just not possible, and it's not going to happen.

Time magazine recently had an article about these individuals that go to the space station. I guess a Russian and a military guy were up there over 400 days. It's kind of interesting the problems these individuals have living in zero gravity. Look that up sometime. When they come back to earth, they can't even stand up. They need someone to help them up. They may even have to lay down for a week or two. There are even cases where, even months after that, they'll be having a cup of coffee and let go of it, and are surprised when it goes to the floor and breaks. Physiologically, the human body has all kinds of problems in zero gravity. Our circulatory system is designed to work in gravity. The blood goes down. We exercise, use our muscles and it pumps it back up and gets recirculated. We don't do well in space no matter what Captain Kirk says; that he's gone where no man has gone before. It's not going to happen, because humanly we can't do it.



1 Peter 5 wraps up this whole topic, the role of the physical and spiritual shepherds in our lives. Peter is talking to the physical helpers, that they should feed the flock and be willing to do that without coercion. He shouldn't be doing it for money. It's okay for a minister to be paid, by the way. We have two in Pacific that are paid. That's a proper use of tithes and offerings. In the context here, they shouldn't be controlling the flock. Christ said, "Don't do that." That's what we should be doing in this congregation, and hopefully we will keep doing that. Physical shepherds are to be an example to the flock, not overlords. They're not military leaders. They're not generals, or any of that. They don't have dominion over anyone's faith. A true, faithful physical shepherd always points people back to the chief shepherd, the chief pastor, that chief overseer, Jesus Christ. That's who we belong to.

*1 Peter 5:1. And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches. I, too, am an elder ... (NKJV)*

He didn't think himself as anything more than that.

*1b) ... and a witness to the sufferings of Christ. ... (NKJV)*

Remember, he was there from the beginning.

*1 continued) ... And I, too, will share in his glory when he is revealed to the whole world. As a fellow elder, I appeal to you:*

*2) Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you ... (NKJV)*

Peter kind of had to learn it the hard way. Remember, Christ said to him three times: "Feed my flock, feed my flock, feed my flock."

*2b) ... Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. (NKJV)*

That's all a physical shepherd does. He serves.

*3) Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example. (NKJV)*

Again, the fruit.

*4) And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor. (NKJV)*

All physical helpers will receive their crown. All saints will receive that crown.

I began by talking about how you may have gone astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and bishop of your life. I want to encourage everyone to appreciate the helpers we have. However, they never ever replace that chief shepherd, our spiritual

pastor. I hope that we concentrate and focus and give honor to the shepherd of our lives. That's what we should be doing. That's where our focus should be.

If we've been straying from Him (and from time to time we do), get back to Him.

Lastly, if you feel like your relationship is getting strong with your chief shepherd, your pastor, make it even stronger. Dig into that word. Let Him roll away the stone and drink more, eat more.

Again, last words here: You were sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the true shepherd of your life, Jesus Christ. Amen.