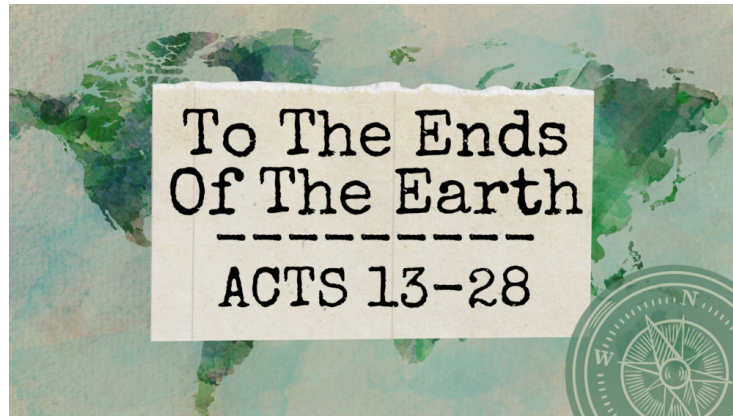


How Shepherds Love Their Sheep



Acts 20:7-38

Bro Kory Cunningham

If you asked me and my wife, what our favorite TV show is, we would probably have a few answers, but on the very short list would be the West Wing. Some of you are familiar with that, but it was actually made in the 90s. We still regularly watch three seasons of the West Wing because we just love it. There are a few reason we love it. The cast is outstanding, the writing is superb, and we just love just the presidency and how that all works. But one of the things that we like most about it is that with the show we get to go to places we are not supposed to go. You get to barge right into the Oval Office with the chief of staff, with the speech writers, with the secret service, with Toby Ziegler and Josh, and President Bartlett. You get to hear how the sausage is just made, so to speak, and you get to hear them argue and fight. And then you see CJ at a press conference

telling the people what they are supposed to know and hear. We get clearance to go places we are not supposed to go and we get to hear things we aren't supposed to hear. We just find it fascinating.

In Acts chapter 20, we are going to get to go to a place we are not supposed to be, and this would be an elders' meeting. Paul is going to call the elders, the pastors, of Ephesus to come to a port, away from the church, away from their congregation, to come to him because he has got some things he wants to say just to them, not to the church, just to these guys. He wants to give some instruction in his farewell. He is getting ready to leave, he is not going to see these guys again, and he wants to tell them a few things. Luke records it in the writing of Acts, which means that even though Ephesus didn't get to hear this, God intended for every church after that to hear what Paul told these shepherds, these pastors. So, we are going to get to go into a place we are really not supposed to be. We are going to eavesdrop into a conversation we are really not supposed to hear as the church, but we are going to get to hear Paul talk to these elders telling them what they are supposed to do, how they are supposed to shepherd. I hope that you leave here with this thought—that pastors are a good gift from a good God for your good.

We are going to pick up midway through this dialogue with these guys in Acts 20. Notice, this is Paul talking to a group of pastors. We are going to read verse 28 and then walk through this story.

Scripture

"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with His own blood."

So, we are going to get to where Paul is at in just a moment. He is going to go to Miletus, he is going to call the elders to him, and he is going to give this address. But before we get there, we are going to get this story that Luke tells. I'm not really sure why he includes it, but it is kind of an interesting story along the way in Paul's missionary journey. We are going to get a snapshot into what the Apostle Paul did as a shepherd, and we are going to see that one of the primary roles of a shepherd is to feed the

sheep. Remember, Jesus told Peter that if he loved Him to feed His sheep. Paul does that, he feeds the sheep of God. We are going to see a moment where Paul does that, perhaps a little too much, because one of the sheep is going to die, mid sermon. Paul's sermon is going to be a little lengthy. Let's just read the story and see if we can make some comments and observations on it.

Paul's Lengthy Sermon

Let's back up, beginning in verse 7 through verse 12. It says, "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted." We see this crazy story! Paul goes really long in a sermon and a youth kid falls out the window and dies. So, let's just back up a little bit. What is happening? How can draw some conclusions from this other than don't fall asleep during church because you might die. That is obligation number one...Don't do that. Stay awake, God could kill you. You can fall out the window. But there has to be some other reasons why Luke included this, and I think Luke is showing us a few things. He is giving us a snapshot into this early church gathering. Notice how he opens it up. He says as we were gathered. It is just like a normal thing, "on the first day of the week, as we were gathered together..." This tells us that they are gathering on the first day of the week was something completely normal in the early church. This is what they did. They came together the first day of every week. That would be Sunday. They gathered together to do what? To break bread and hear the Word of God. Gathering together was a normal thing in the early church. So as we come together this morning, we are doing something that is very ancient. We are doing

something that is two thousand years old. Ever since Christ rose from the dead, His people have been gathering together the first day of every week to celebrate together, to sing together, to hear the Word of God together.

So in Acts, we see this gathering taking place and this is a thing that the early church did, and it just so happens that the Apostle Paul is there. You can probably expect that the sermon is going to be a little longer than normal. Everybody has their notes out and everybody is paying attention. It's night time. The early church probably met at night because they would have worked all day. Sunday is not a holiday this point. They don't get Sunday off in their culture, so they would work all day and then they would gather together as the church, usually at night, to hear the Word of God. A lot of times, their gathering was inconvenient for them. They were tired because they had worked all day, but now they are here at the gathering to break bread (that is probably the Lord's Supper) and to hear the Word of God. So Paul gets to deliver the Word, and Luke gives us a few clues that Paul was really going on. He says he prolonged his speech, and then he says he still talked longer. Luke is basically saying he is really over his time allotment...like they invited him to speak for an hour and he is on hour six, so this is a long sermon. There was no clock in the back like we have. Our big clock back there says I have 38 minutes. We have that so nobody dies during the service. We have a stop time so that the sound team doesn't fall off and kill themselves, so we are on a time-sensitive measure. This is why, because we have texts like this where people tend to die during long sermons. ☺ But Paul is preaching on and on and on, and the room is lit by candles. You can imagine this room. It's dark. There are candles everywhere, so, it's probably warm. If you ever been in a warm environment, late at night, you tend to just get really sleepy.

I have been to some of these youth events. One event in particular we were doing was Snowcross. We were driving to Paoli Peaks and we realized the weather forecast for our ski day was rain for the whole day. So, we had this genius plan. What if we drive all the way to Paoli and get there at midnight and what if we ski all night long? We could stay up all night long and ski, and then the next day we will do our teaching. Great idea, right? Well, you can imagine the 10 AM worship service. By the time I got to

point two, everyone is asleep. Every youth kid there is asleep. Luckily, they weren't three stories high. So, I have been in these moments where it's late, you are tired, and you just want to go to sleep.

Eutychus Raised from the Dead

Bless this little youth kid's heart because he is at least there, right? He is at church. A lot of people are like, oh, he should've been awake. This is a long sermon and at least he is there, at least he is trying. He is in this back window, and you can imagine his mom probably told him to get out of the window, but there is this little breeze...and then it gets longer and longer, and he falls asleep and falls out the window, three stories to his death. So it's midnight, he falls down, and dies. Can you imagine being in that room? I'm sure everyone panicked. Moms panicked, dads panicked, and they start running down the stairs. Paul doesn't just keep teaching, he stops and he too runs downstairs. We see a shepherd that not only feeds but he also cares for the sheep. Someone died and he goes to him, and he does something a little strange. The ESV says he bends down, but the NIV really captures it better; it says he lays on him. He jumps on the kid and lays on him. Now, the reason that is significant is, if you read the Old Testament, you see Elijah and Elisha also doing this. When they have a dead kid, they would lay on the kid and the kid would come back to life. Paul is in some way in lineage of Elisha and Elijah doing that same type of thing. He lays down on this kid and the kid comes back to life. He regains his life. Of course, everyone begins celebrating. They are happy, and they go back upstairs.

At this point, you would think Paul would be like—*Ok, this a long sermon. We have already killed one person. We should all go home.* But it says they broke bread and then he preached throughout the night all the way until the morning. It was like another six hours. Imagine being in that gathering. This is a long sermon. But what does it show us? I think it shows us a couple things. Number one, the gathering was normal. This is what the early church did. They gathered together to celebrate Jesus and to hear the Word of God. Secondly, their gathering was Word-driven. It was a Word-driven gathering. What did they want when they gathered? They wanted the Word of God. They wanted Paul to teach, and Paul went on

and on and on. They stuck around. They stayed there because his message was life giving, even shown by a kid being raised from the dead. The words that he spoke were giving life to dead people physically, but also spiritually. This is what the gathering is about. We gather together to primarily hear the Word of God. So we get this snapshot of Paul as a pastor, as a shepherd. What does he do? He feeds the sheep and he cares for the sheep.

Paul Calls a Meeting of the Elders

Now, we are going to see that Paul is going to call some other pastors to him to tell them that their task, in a lot of ways, is do the same thing. They are also supposed to feed the sheep and to care for the sheep. So, let's pick up the story. Verses 13–16 tell us just about the journey. Luke and other people take a ship while Paul goes by land, and they end up in Miletus. Verse 17 says, "Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came together, he said to them..." So Paul is about to leave. He wants to go to Jerusalem. He wants to get there for Pentecost. He is going to leave and we are going to find out he is never coming back. Instead of going back to the Ephesus church, holding a church meeting, and telling everybody what shepherds do, he calls the leaders of the church, the elders, to come to him. He took a three-day journey, came to this port in Miletus because he had some things he wanted to say to them. So the elders of Ephesus come to Paul.

Now, the term elder, bishop, overseer are all terms that are used to speak of the office of pastor, the office of shepherd, which is what we are going to see in just a moment. It says, the elders, plural, so we don't know if this is like one big church that had several pastors or if there are a lot of house churches that each had one pastor. We are really not sure. We just know that multiple guys came and they are the elders of Ephesus and they come to Paul and Paul wants to speak to them. He is going to share with them that he is leaving and here is the task—*You need to shepherd well. I have been a shepherd. I have shown what a shepherd does. Now, I'm leaving this task to you and you need to shepherd well.*

Paul Exemplifies Pastoral Ministry

Let's pick up what Paul says to them. In the first few verses, he is going to really highlight his own example, his own life—*Hey, here is what I did as a shepherd. You saw it, you took note, and therefore, you should follow my example.* Even though this is addressed to pastors, most of these things apply to all of us as believers. We should all want to follow the example that Paul gives us in these next verses. So, let's just hear what Paul has to say. Verses 18–19 say, "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews..." So, he first says you guys know my life, not just my words, not just the Bible studies. You saw my life, you saw how I lived every day, and here is my life. I am a servant of the Lord Jesus. Paul is revealing to these guys that he was a humble servant. That is what his life was about. He wants them to know if they are going to be a pastor, they have to be a humble servant. Humility and servant are two qualifications. If you're going to lead a church, if you are going to be a pastor of a church, you need to be humble and you need to be a servant of the Lord Jesus. Paul fought through trials and tears. He really cared about the people that he is leading. So Paul shares his own life. He is a humble servant. I think for all of us, whether you are a pastor or a congregant, you should want to be a humble servant like Paul in humility serving others because you are a servant of the Lord Jesus.

Paul starts with his life and then he is going to go to his work. Verses 20–21 say, "...how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul is a humble servant who has a work to do. What is his work? It's to proclaim the gospel to people. It's to teach people the Word of God. I love what he says about his teaching. It was about repentance and faith. He is trying to teach people repentance and faith, but notice what he says about repentance because it stuck out to me. Verse 21 says he is testifying of repentance towards God. Now most of the time, when we think of repentance, or if someone tells you that you need

to repent, you think about turning from something, right? You need to repent of sin. You need to repent of this thing that you are doing. So, we talk about repentance as turning from. That is true, repentance involves turning from, but Paul uses it not turning from but turning to. He is talking about the repentance turning to God. See, we don't just repent from sin to a better life. We don't repent from doing something bad to trying to do something good. No, repentance involves turning from sin to the one true living God. See, the gospel is us turning from sin to God. God is the gospel. God is who we need, and that is why Paul couples that with faith in Jesus. We turn to God with our faith in Jesus. So the work that Paul did as a humble servant—he is trying to tell people the gospel to get them to repent and turn to God by faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul is not just humble servant, he is not just telling people about the Word, but he lives a surrendered life. Notice what it says in verses 22–23 say, “And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.” Paul says here is where I am going; I am going to Jerusalem. Now, why is Paul going to Jerusalem? Is it just because he wants to? Does he want to go visit mama because he hasn't been home in a while? Why does he want to go to Jerusalem? He says because I'm constrained by the Holy Spirit; I'm tied to, I'm fettered, I'm chained to the Holy Spirit. In other words, Paul is saying the Spirit is guiding him. And as the Spirit guides him, He is also telling him that where they are going he is about to get put in prison, and he is probably going to die. Paul was like—*Alright, I guess I'm following Jesus who also got beat and died. So, I guess this is what I'm going to do too.* So he is constrained by the Spirit to go somewhere knowing that it's not going to work out good for him, but it's going to work out good for the Kingdom of God. He is surrendered. He is constrained by the Spirit.

Paul's Desire to Finish the Course and Fulfil His Ministry

Coupled with being constrained by the Spirit, Paul is not going to count his life as value but he is going to aim at something grand. Notice what it says in verse 24, “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to

myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” He is constrained by the Spirit knowing that the Spirit is leading him in the place of suffering, but what does he say? He says I don’t account my life is something of value to myself. I just want to pause for a moment...it sounds like Paul is saying his life has no value. I don’t think that is what he is saying, because Paul has also read the Old Testament and he knows that he is made in the image of God. He knows that he has value, dignity, and worth from God. He knows that Christ died for him, that God loves him, and that he is a child of God. He is going to receive the Kingdom. So, I don’t think he is saying his life has no value. He says he does not consider his life of value to himself. I think a little phrase ‘to myself’ is very insightful. In other words, he is saying if I live my life *to* myself, if I live my life *for* myself, there is no value in that. I would waste my life because I’m an image bearer of God to worship God. I have been made by God, through God, for God for His glory forever. So he is living his life, not to himself but to God. He wants to find his value in fulfilling the course and the work. He says I want to finish the course, and I want to fulfill my ministry. Those are two things that Paul wants. That is his aim. That is his goal.

So, it is this idea of a being in a race, in a marathon, that is what the Christian life is about. And Paul says when I run the marathon I want to finish well. I want to cross the finish line and hear Jesus say well done, my good and faithful servant. And hopefully that is what you want. If you are a believer, you realize this is a long race and you have been in it for a while. It is weary and it’s hard at times, but you want to finish well. You want to keep running. You want to run all the way to the end. You want to finish this marathon well. That is what Paul is saying. He wants to finish his Christian life; he wants to end well. But also, he says, along the way during this race, he wants to do the ministry that Jesus has given him, and his ministry is to proclaim the gospel to all people. So, along this race, there are stops all along the way that Paul said, I want to finish the race but I don’t want to miss every opportunity along the way. I think that is insightful for us as believers that we would desire to finish the race, faithful—but also to realize that this is a marathon and we are not here

just to finish, we are here to do work all along the way. We are here to do good things for the Kingdom of Christ. We are here to help people, serve people, and build things to glorify God all along the way.

So Paul doesn't want to just finish the race, he is worried about how he actually runs the race. He doesn't want to miss opportunities that Jesus has given him. I think for you, hopefully, that is a desire in your heart to finish well. But you don't want to get the finish line and hear Jesus say you made it but you missed every opportunity I gave you to make a difference—I gave you opportunity after opportunity and you just kept running right past all of the things I had for you. So don't just worry about finishing, worry about finishing, but worry about doing the things God wants you to do all along the way so that you run the race well, so that you finish some other people falling behind you because of the good things that you have done for the Kingdom of Christ. So Paul's aim is to finish well and fulfill the ministry that Christ has given him. He has shown himself as an example to these pastors by being a good shepherd and showing them how to shepherd so they can follow his example and do the same.

Paul's Template for a Pastor

Now, Paul is going to give specific things for them to do. We are going to switch from being mainly focused on Paul to now being focused on these pastors that are gathered around him. Notice what it says in verse 25, "And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the Kingdom will see my face again." It's just the reality having been together, served together, planted churches together, being shown how to do this, and they are not going to see him again. This is their last meeting. This is their last farewell and I don't know how many of the guys were expecting that, because Paul is the guy they can call and text and go see whenever they need him to figure out stuff. Now, Paul is saying he isn't going to be there anymore. He is leaving them in charge of the church of God. I can just imagine there's a little bit of like—*uh oh, we weren't expecting this quite yet... You are leaving and we are at the helm of the ship?* So, if there are any guys that were just kind of loosely paying attention, they are all locked in now. These are the final instructions. This is like Jesus after the resurrection with the disciples when He tells they to

go and make disciples of all nations. They are locked in because they know He is about to leave and He is not coming back until He comes back for good. They are listening.

Notice what Paul says. He is really going to give them a template for how to do ministry and how to be a pastor. We are going to see four things that pastors should do:

1. Feed the sheep
2. Lead the sheep
3. Care for the sheep
4. Protect the sheep

Four things: feed, lead, care, and protect. Paul is going to tell them all those things as he gives this final address. Verses 26–27 say this, “Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” So Paul is with this group of guys and he says I am innocent of the blood of all—*on the day of judgement, I can wipe my hands and say I’m not guilty if someone doesn’t find their way to heaven and end up in hell; I’m innocent*. How could Paul say he is innocent of everyone when it comes to their final judgment? He says it is because he has declared to all the whole council of God. As a pastor, how do you not have people’s blood on your hands? You declare to them the whole council of God. In other words, he is telling them you need to give your people the Bible. You need to feed your people well. I think what is really instructive is when he says “the whole council of God.”

Feed the Sheep

You might be new to Hardin. Maybe you haven’t come very much. Maybe it’s a little strange how we do things because we don’t preach like everyone else. A lot of churches do preach like we preach, but it’s not always the norm to preach through whole books of the Bible. You might have come here for the first time and wonder why we picked Acts 20...“Why are you preaching about why I should love you as a pastor? That seems kind of self-serving.” It really does, right? Like, “Oh, well, huh, this is a weird church.” The reason we are preaching Acts 20 is because last

week, we preached Acts 19 and when you come back next Sunday, we are going to be in Acts 21. Why? Because that is where Luke picked up. See, we want to preach whole books of the Bible because we believe God wants you to know all that He said. See, we do preach topics, we do preach about family and different things, and we think that that is good and important, but it's not the primary diet that we serve to you as a congregation because we don't believe God has placed us here to try to figure out everything you need at every moment. We believe God has already written it out. He has already delivered the mail; we are just the mailmen who get to share with you what God says, what God thinks is important for you to know. We don't get to pick and choose what we feel like you should know; we are going to open up the Bible and share with you all that God has said. Sometimes it can be very applicable; sometimes it might not, but you are going to hear—here is God, here is what He said, and this is His Word. This is the whole council. This is the whole story. This is everything. We are not skipping and hiding. We are saying here is what He wants you to know.

So Paul is given these guys a template—Hey, when you go back home, don't just do a bunch of one-off series that tell them everything they need to know today...No, give them the Word of God, preach them the council of God's Word, give them the Bible; give them what I have said because I know what they need more than you do. So we try to follow this template. We try to go through whole books of the Bible. We try to rotate through books of the Bible because we want you to get the whole council of God's Word. We think Paul is giving them that template. As pastors, we feed the sheep. That is really important. That is like point number one because if sheep don't eat, they die. If you have livestock, if you have animals, you have a dog, just stop feeding it, and see what happens. It's going to get grumpy. It's going to get vicious and it's going to die. It's not good. Dogs need food. Sheep need food. So as pastors and shepherds, we need to feed the sheep because if sheep don't eat, they die. This is really important that Paul is giving them this message of needing to feed the sheep, but now he is going to switch gears.

Lead the Sheep

Not only do you need to feed the sheep, but you also need to lead the sheep. Here is what it says in verse 28, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers..." Notice Paul used that word flock. It is this pattern of shepherding. It is this imagery of shepherding and flocks and sheep. He says you are going to be an overseer; you are going to give direction to that flock, which he then calls the church of God. So there is going to be leading that is involved in pastoral ministry, but notice where he starts when he talks about leading. He tells the pastors not to start with leading their church, but start with leading themselves. The first thing he says is pay attention to yourselves. Pay 'careful' attention to yourselves. This is a very important first note when we think about pastoral ministry, because what Paul Tripp would say in his book, Dangerous Calling, is that what pastors need to always remember is they are shepherds but they are also sheep. Do you know what sheep need? Sheep need leading themselves. Sheep need to get under the care of the Good Shepherd, who is Jesus, because as pastors, we are also just as prone to wander. We are just as prone to eat wrong things. We are just as prone to fall over and need restoration. So we need to pay attention to ourselves before we try to pay attention to the flock. That is what Paul is trying to tell these guys—you are a pastor, but remember, you are also a child of God. You are also a sheep and you need help just like everyone else. You need to pay attention to yourself. Don't just preach sermons to your congregation. You need to hear those same sermons and do those same sermons. Don't just tell your people to repent; you need to repent of those same things because you are also a sheep that wonders and you are a sheep under the good care of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, so pay attention to yourselves.

Maybe some of you in here are aspiring to be a pastor. You think maybe the Lord is calling you. The Reformed Pastor by Richard Baxter (he is one of the Puritans) is a great book on that little phrase, pay attention to yourselves. It's an amazing book written to pastors on that, "Take heed of yourselves." But after the pastor is taking care of himself, he is watching

after himself, because he needs to have a private life with God before he has a public ministry before men. That is really important, that the pastor would be, in private, a man of God before, in public, he has a ministry of God. We see that so often of guys who get to the end of the road who had a great public ministry, and when the layers are peeled back, something happens and it reveals that in private they weren't really following the Lord. They had a good public ministry, but not a genuine private life of humility and holiness and prayerfulness. And so, pastors, myself included, take heed. I want my private life to be bigger than any public life I ever have because that is so, so important. That is what Paul is telling these pastors.

So pay attention to yourselves *and* to all the flock. Why would a shepherd pay attention to sheep? Well, because sheep tend to wander. Sheep tend to go in the pasture not supposed to be in. Sheep tend to drink water they are not supposed to drink. Sheep tend to fall over. They tend to get little parasites. They are just an animal that you just love, but they need a lot of love and that is what God's telling you...I love you but you need a lot of love. That is what He is communicating to all of us—Hey, you sheep...Love you...kind of smelly...need a lot of help, so I'm going to give you under shepherds to just come along, to nudge you. You are always wandering, you are always going away, so I'm just going to constantly nudge you in the right direction. I'm going to constantly lead you to still water, lead you to better pastures, pick you up, and put oil on your head. I love you, but you are helpless, so I'm going to help you through some folks. So God has given us this this imagery of why should shepherds care for sheep. It's because sheep need care. Sheep need shepherds, and shepherds need to shepherd. Both of those things are true when it comes to the New Testament model of the church.

Notice Paul said, "...in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers..." An overseer is a leader. Sheep don't only need feed; they need direction. They need to know where to go and how to get there. They need to know how to live their life in relation to God and what the future looks like. They need to know how to do all those things the Lord has called them to do. Sheep need direction. So pastors don't just preach and teach; they also lead. If

you are going to be a pastor of a church, you have to in some way lead the congregation. Help show the congregation where they should go and what the next step is, how to do discipleship, and how to get plugged in. All those things involve leadership. So Paul is telling a bunch of pastors they need to feed the sheep and they also need to lead the sheep. They need direction on where they should go.

Care for the Sheep

Not only do pastors need to lead the sheep, they also need to care for the sheep. Notice what Paul says, "...which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers *to care for the church of God* which He obtained with His own blood." Why should we lead the sheep and feed the sheep? It is because we also need to care for the sheep. The sheep also need care. They need feed, they need direction, and they also need care. And part of pastoral ministry involves caring for the sheep. If you are a sheep, here is what you need to know...you are going to need care from time to time. Maybe it is just a little bit of care, but maybe it's a lot of care. What should you do when you need care? As a sheep, you cry out to your shepherd. You cry out to your shepherds. You ask for help. You come to one of us for care. The role of a shepherd is to be that care. Maybe it's a phone call as you are going in the hospital. Maybe it's holding your hand beside your bed when you are breathing your last words. Maybe it's through a difficult spot in your marriage, or need some counseling, or just some trouble with understanding something, or making a big decision. The Lord is saying that you are not on your own, you have shepherds, and the shepherds are there to care for you. Shepherds, care for the sheep...and sheep, go to your shepherds for care. That is this beautiful relationship, this loving relationship between shepherds and sheep where we care for one another. Paul is telling these pastors to do that well. Go back home, go back to Ephesus and feed the sheep, lead the sheep, but also care for the sheep. Care for their needs, care for their souls.

Protect the Sheep

The last Paul is going to tell them is pastoral ministry is about protecting the sheep. Notice what it says in verses 29–31, “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.” Paul is saying the sheep need protecting. Why? Because wolves love sheep, and there are wolves on the outside and there are wolves on the inside. He said there are two dangers. One is the dangers from without, and I think in our context that would be the culture around us. There are so many messages, so many teachings, and so many things that would lead a sheep astray. Part of a pastor’s role is to help sheep think through what are those issues in our culture that don’t align with the gospel. Those things that we can’t say yes to and we have to have conviction around because walking with Jesus means we can’t act and look just like the cultures. How do we navigate those things? Well, a pastor can be helpful in some of those things. A pastor is to be a watchman, a watchman on the wall looking out for all of those things that can ensnare the congregation.

So we have wolves without, but Paul says there are also wolves within. In his letter to young Timothy, he identifies that Timothy has a lot of wolves in his congregation. He says you need to deal with some of these false teachers. We have seen the New Testament that there are all sorts of false teachers coming up within the context of the church, Christians who are saying seemingly true things, but they are really wrong things. They are leading people astray from the true gospel. Pastors are to help the sheep understand what the shepherd’s voice sounds like, what Jesus’s voice actually sounds like because there are a lot of voices. There are a lot of things that can lead us astray in different directions, and Paul is saying protect the sheep. Amen. Protect them from danger from without and protect them from danger from within. So be Careful on every YouTube video you watch that is Christian. It might be crazy. Just know that. So maybe when you see a video that disrupts everything you have ever thought, maybe check with the pastor and say, “Hey, have you seen this because it seems strange?” And they could say, “Yeah, it is strange. Let’s

read the Bible, maybe more than watching videos.” So, part of the role of those leaders in your life are to help work through what some danger areas are and for you, as a sheep, to be able to go to your shepherd when you are in those dangers, when you are feeling those wolves come around you, so that we can help you out and work through some of those things.

The Authority of the Pastor

So we see Paul telling these guys you have to feed the sheep, lead the sheep, care for the sheep, and protect the sheep. That is your role as a pastor. As a sheep, that is the role of your shepherds. That is the role of your pastors. So, the question is, how are they going to do this? What is their authority? What is their source? Well, Paul is going to commend them to two sources: God and God’s Word. Notices in verse 32, “And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” I can imagine the guys now thinking—*Hey, Paul, we can’t do this. How about you just stay around? Because we can’t feed, lead, care, and protect all these sheep. Man, there there’s a lot going on in my congregation. You don’t know what is happening. You don’t know the culture around me.* And Paul is saying here is what I’m going to do; I’m going to commend you to God and to God’s Word. What you need to fulfill your ministry is not yourself, ambition, or hard work, what you need is God and God’s Word. It is as if Paul is handing them their shepherd’s staff. Well, what is my staff? What am I going to hold as I walk into a congregation, try to lead them, feed them, care for them, and protect them well? The staff is the Word of God. It is your staff and rod. Take the Word of God, commend yourself to it, and use the Word of God to shepherd your people. Their authority, their source, is the Word of God.

How do you care for people? Give them the Word. How do you counsel people? Show them the Word. How do you love people? Love them through the Word because the Word is what we see as this glorious thing that God has given us. Commend them to God. And in fact, just thinking about commending them to God, if you go back up to verse 28, we see that even pastoral ministry is done in the context of the Trinity. Notice what it says, “Pay careful attention to the flock which the Holy Spirit has

made you overseers..." So pastors, don't just decide—*Hey, I think I want this gig, maybe they'll vote on me and I will get in. I will be a pastor.* No, it's the Holy Spirit who appoints true pastors to the work of ministry. So the Holy Spirit has appointed these guys as pastors. Notice this, "...to care for the church of God..." So it is not the pastor's church, it is God's church..."which He obtained with His own blood." Who is that? It is Jesus Christ—blood shed on the cross. The Holy Spirit appointed pastors to this, the church they are over is God's, and the reason God has sheep is because Jesus died for them. The Trinity—Father, Son, Holy Spirit are all in the work of this thing we call pastoral ministry. So, what do we do? We take the Word of God commended to God. We are commended to God in the Word and we shepherd the people of God.

Then Paul is going to give, really, the heartbeat of a pastor. It is to give more than he receives. Notice this in verses 33–35, "I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Paul didn't do this to get rich and famous, to wear a great suit, and look good. No, he has made tents to pay his own way. He did this to serve, to give more than he had gotten. What does that align with? It aligns with the words of Jesus who said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Now that line, if you try to find it in the gospels, you are not going to find it there. Jesus didn't say this in the gospels, which troubles some people. How can Paul quote Jesus and you can't in the gospels? It's pretty obvious Jesus said a few more things that are in the gospels. He said more than the gospels captured. Even John says at the end of his gospel that Jesus said a whole lot more than this, but these were just the words they wrote down that the Holy Spirit wanted them to know. So they are taking some of the teaching that Jesus taught them, and one of those things had been that it's more blessed to give than to receive. And Paul is saying in pastoral ministry, it's better to give than to receive. Amen. They should do it with a generous heart. This is about others not about yourself. That is how you should lead your people, giving to them more than they give to yourself.

Paul Prepares to Leave

Then in verses 36–38, we see this love between these shepherds, and the love they are supposed to go back to their people with. It says this, “And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.” That is just a gut-reaching end...It reminds me of the Lord of the Rings, Return of the King. Gandalf is standing there getting ready to cross over the sea to the other world. The little hobbits are there, Frodo and Bilbo, and they are just teary eyed. Tears are streaming on their faces because they know Gandalf’s leaving. He is not coming back, and it’s just this emotion you feel there, because Gandalf has been there in every moment. He has been there; he has shown them. They have always had questions and they went to him, and now he is leaving. They are all sobbing and crying, and then Gandalf says, ‘Not all tears are evil. In this moment of beauty, our fellowship has now ended. We are parting ways.’ You can feel that same tension with Paul and these guys, though, how much greater! Paul has been with them, he has planted churches with them, and he has been the guy they have gone to. He has been their Gandalf. If they had any questions, they went to Paul. And now, Paul saying he is going to go in a ship across the sea and they are not going to see each other again. He is leaving it to them. So they are weeping. Their hearts are being ripped out now because Paul has been their guy, their shepherd. Now, Paul is saying as I have been your shepherd, you go be the shepherd to your sheep. Go love them well.

Responsibility to our Pastors

So, what do we do with a message like this? I mean, most of us aren’t aspiring to be pastors. Most of us aren’t going to feed, lead, care, and protect the sheep. So what do we do with this? As sheep, how do we take this message? We have eavesdropped in this conversation that we are not supposed to be a part of. We have been in on a meeting that we weren’t supposed to hear. What do we do with this? Number one, as a sheep, have a correct view of your shepherds. Your shepherds are a good gift from a

good God for your good, so view them correctly. Maybe some have been jaded by a pastor. Maybe I have jaded you and let you down. There is a real good probability that has happened. So, a little forgiveness, a little grace, because we also are sheep who are trying to shepherd, who desperately need our Good Shepherd. Secondly, pray for your pastors. Pray for Bro Ricky and the pastors here at Hardin who help guide you, shepherd you, and oversee you. Please pray for us. We need your prayer. And then thirdly, do what the Bible says, submit to your pastors. Sometimes the pastor is going to say something to you that you don't want to hear, but it's not because you are right and he is wrong. It's because the Bible has declared something you don't want to hear. What do you do in that moment? You submit to the Word of God that the pastor is giving to you because that is God's way of leading and protecting and feeding and caring for you. Submit to your pastors when they can show you from the Word that this is from the Lord. Lastly, remember that there is only one perfect Shepherd, one perfect Pastor, and His name is Jesus. Every other pastor will get it wrong. They will mess it up. I promise you, I will do that ten thousand times. We are all sheep, but there is only one perfect Good Shepherd, and every shepherd of God's church shepherds under Him, through Him, and for Him.

I want to close with a prayer that is very familiar. It is Psalms 23. I just want to pray this as we think about not only the shepherds over us who help feed, lead, care, and protect us, but also our Good Shepherd who does that perfectly when we often do it miserably.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. And all God's sheep said, amen.