# Theology  

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# Pastors, Fathers, and Shepherds: <br> Models of the Kingdom 



Glenn MILES

Ifind the picture of the shepherd in sçripture to be very comfort ing. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. ' He knows the sheep by name and leads them. ${ }^{2}$ He will actively seek out the lost sheep to bring it home. ${ }^{3}$ He is so committed that he is prepared to die for the sheep. ${ }^{4}$

Jesus charged Peter with the responsibility of shepherding the lambs and sheep as a demonstration of his love for his Lord. ${ }^{5}$ As pastors and leaders in the church, and as fathers of our families, we are required to do the same. Isn't it interesting that Jesus mentions lambs before the sheep, surely as a reminder of God's priority for children?

> 'Jn 10:1-18; Lk 15:3-7.
> ${ }^{2}$ In 10:4.
> ${ }^{3}$ Lk 15:3-7.
> ${ }^{4}$ Jn 10:11.
> ${ }^{5}$ Jn 21:15-17.

In 1 Peter 5:2 we are asked to "be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care." As we would expect, youth are encouraged to submit to elders, but the verse teaches that "All of you (meaning youth and elders) are expected to "clothe yourselves with humility." Elders cannot be humble unless they listen to their flock. Shepherds are asked to be "not greedy for money but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you but ... examples to the flock."

That most familiar psalm, the twenty-third, is also a tribute to God as our shepherd-leading, restoring, guiding, anointing. The rod and staff are seen as comforters. It is better to have the shepherd's staff directing us than to be left vulnerable and without direction.

And yet Proverbs 13:24 ("He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him") and 29:15 ("The rod of correction imparts wisdom but a child left to himself disgraces his mother") are often used as an excuse to use a stick to beat a child. If these passages are understood in the light of a shepherd's rod, a different picture emerges of discipline, guidance, and nurture.

In a country that has experienced so much violence, it may be difficult for us to realize that discipline is not the same as violence, but we must remember that God is a God of grace and forgiveness.

I also find it interesting that the sheep need to listen to Jesus' voice so that they can follow him. ${ }^{6}$ As pastors and leaders, we will also have many who will listen to our voice so they can follow us. Does what we say echo the voice of the Good Shepherd, or do we speak with our own harsh voices?

The Old Testament warns shepherds who only take care of themselves. "You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally." Thankfully God himself intervenes and cares for the sheep by searching for the strays, binding up the injured, and strengthening the weak, but promises to destroy the "sleek and strong," concluding "I will shepherd the flock with justice. ${ }^{"}$

[^0]Perhaps you yourself have been the victim of another's harshness or brutality either physically or emotionally? In an anonymous survey at a recent provincial EFC pastors' conference, out of eightyfour responses, two individuals admitted to having been raped and twenty-two to having been beaten by their parents as a child. Five people felt it was less serious or not serious for a child aged twelve years to be touched on the genitals by an adult. Twenty-six felt it was less serious or not serious for parents to beat their children. I believe that these figures are causes of concern in view of our call as pastors, leaders, and fathers to be shepherds.

Abuse of children is something God cannot tolerate. ${ }^{9}$ We are called first to feed and nurture his lambs, and then to provide guidance and discipline. We are also called to be examples. This is where there can be a problem. Children who experience violence themselves are more likely to abuse their children when they become adults. They have poor role models and do not see violence as wrong, and so the cycle repeats itself.

Can you see how things repeat themselves from grandparent to parent to child? The cycle can only be broken when an adult chooses to stop using violence, and instead explores non-violent ways to discipline. Then the child experiences a different way. Patterns are difficult to change, but with God's love, grace, and healing, change is possible.

This is the same for pastors who have experienced abusive leadership themselves. They must also choose to do something different and become themselves examples of the Good Shepherd. ${ }^{10}$

For those of us who have experienced the consequences of abuse, what could be more hopeful than the picture of the lion lying down with the lamb in Isaiah 11:6?

But in the meantime, those of us in leadership must lose no time in "strengthening the weak, healing the sick, and binding up the
${ }^{8}$ Ezek 34:16.
${ }^{\text {º }}$ Lk 17:2.
${ }^{10} 1$ Pet 5:3.
injured" lambs and "bringing back the strays and searching for the lost" even where we may have driven them away. Then "when the Chief Shepherd appears you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. "ll


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