

Equipping Thoughts for Leaders



December 17, 2020

Shutdowns and the Importance of Gathering Scattered Sheep

With all the COVID and the corresponding shutdowns have brought intense heat upon people and households. Fire can accomplish both good and bad things. It can destroy things but in the right context, with God involved, it can refine things, like precious metals (Psalms 66:10, Isaiah 48:10, 1 Peter 1:7, etc.). We want the refining fire while at the same time helping people recover from the destructive one.

The shutdowns have caused devastating effects on individuals, families, and relationships due to the isolation and uncertainty of losing jobs, facing fears of sickness, and other things like the disruption of their children's schooling. Domestic violence has increased greatly during the lockdowns <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2020/04/22/domestic-violence-has-increased-during-coronavirus-lockdowns>

The shutdowns have also been damaging to marriages. One legal website I came across cites other research in which 31% of couples say the quarantine has been damaging to their relationships and divorce agreement sales increased 34% during the shutdowns. Lawyers are predicting record numbers of divorce filings once quarantine restrictions

are lifted and who knows the extent to which couples living together will separate.

<https://legaltemplates.net/resources/personal-family/divorce-rates-covid-19/>

Isolation is always a dangerous thing. When the Bible shows us that “the devil prowls around like a lion seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8) we know both in the natural and spiritual, predators seek prey that become isolated from their herd. God gives leaders to help overcome the enemy in this battle (Acts 20:28-31).

- *Ezekiel 34:5 So my sheep have been scattered without a shepherd, and they are easy prey for any wild animal*

When we consider God’s design for Biblical leadership there is an important element of shepherding in it. The Bible uses the analogy of shepherds and sheep to describe His design for His people 352 times.

Jesus was, and is, the Great Shepherd. After His resurrection when asking Peter (with the others) three times “do you love me” Jesus responded each time with “tend My lambs, feed My sheep, and shepherd My sheep” (John 21:15-17). Peter later echoed this with instruction to church leaders, “shepherd the church of God under the Chief Shepherd, Jesus” (1 Peter 5:1-5).

The Heart of God for People

Biblical leaders will have the compassionate heart of Jesus, our Chief Shepherd, to see sheep joined to Him and gathered/living among His flock the local church. This is an important part of our work on earth.

- *Mat 9:36-38 Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd... "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."*

When people are disconnected from God and His sheepfold (local churches) they are lost. God expressed this fact throughout the Scriptures. We usually think of lost sheep as those who haven’t “made a decision to be saved.” God looks at it a little broader and deeper. Those who are scattered from Him and the fold are lost sheep.

In the Bible, there is no such thing as a healthy isolated sheep. Our American culture may prize independence and individualism but God doesn't. The whole New Testament was written to flocks of sheep, local churches, and to accurately understand what God is saying we need to read it from that context. Even the letters to individuals like Timothy and Titus were written to shepherds and most of the instruction is about how to facilitate God's life among His flock.

The danger of isolated sheep and the call to go after them is why Jesus gave the parables about good shepherds.

- *Jeremiah 50:6 My people have become lost sheep; Their shepherds have led them astray... They have forgotten their resting place (Matthew 10:5-6).*
- *Luke 15:4-6 "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? (5) "When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. (6) "And comes home... 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' (Matthew 18:10-14).*

This is what good shepherds do. They go after the lost and straying sheep. Some may not know Jesus yet while others have simply drifted away from His flock/family for various reasons, including COVID isolation.

Become a relentless pursuer of scattered sheep.

We know isolation is the breeding ground for the work of the enemy to destroy people's lives and faith. We cannot let the online world be a substitute for the nature of God through family relationships. If we don't want people to fall through the cracks, or be scattered, then we go after them. Be a relentless pursuer. Don't leave people in isolation that destroys their spiritual life. Digital engagement is important but it is not the most important part of the health of His flock.

Steps leaders can take to become pursuers of lost/scattered sheep

Care, care and care with the affections of Christ. The old saying is true, "people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." The only proper motive for shepherding is love for the owner of the sheep (Jesus) and love for the sheep themselves. This is the difference between true shepherds and hirelings. Hirelings have their own interests first. They only care for sheep if it is convenient or beneficial

for them. If not, they abandon the flock or are content to leave it scattered (John 10:14-17).

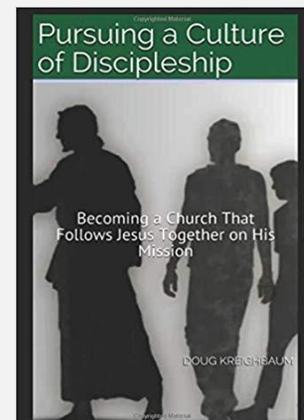
People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Make sure to hold onto the right scorecard of “success.” The old scorecard of “success” among the church world was attendance at meetings. COVID is causing a new scorecard to emerge that can be just as insufficient, “Online engagements” or “clicks.” Online engagement doesn't tell the whole story about the condition of God's sheep. I read an interesting survey released by Barna this past July regarding the effects of COVID on the church. They found that 32% of Christians have stopped attending their previous church and half of those say they will not return when the shutdown ends. Also, the amount of time people are tuning in has greatly decreased. The overall online engagements still look good because this phenomenon doesn't show up in the statistics.

Move from clicks to communication. Remember that online communication can't satisfy all the elements of the real thing so pursue real communication.

Move from seeing yourself as a provider of information to a pursuer of lost, disconnected sheep. We don't simply want to create content but cultivate community. This means both having conversations, interactions, and helping others do the same. A popular saying now among leaders is “content is king.” There is truth to that but even more important is the truth that while content is king, “relational connections are emperor.” Look for ways to help others cultivate caring communication. Make a regular practice to check on people. This is true for lost sheep in your neighborhood as well as God's people who are isolated.

Facilitate “fuller” communication with people. God has designed communication to engage our senses through feedback. Much gets communicated through seeing expressions and hearing voices. Reading digital words on a screen limits communication. This is why posting things through social media can be so destructive with no communication feedback. There are several online vehicles through which you can increase communication such as Facetime, Zoom,



Don't forget to check out this book:

Skype, etc. Set up communication chains with groups using vehicles like WhatsApp for regular interactions but go beyond with phone calls etc. Also, utilize other things that work during the shutdowns like driveway greetings and prayer time for those who are stuck at home. During the holiday season, some churches are doing driveway caroling to sing, pray for, and give gifts to families who are more isolated.

Practice some of the “59 One Another’s” each day. All of them can be done through shutdown related avenues of communication. You can download them, as well as modern day “one another’s” by clicking here.

Let’s make sure we pursue these types of things so that lost sheep, those yet to know Jesus and others who are isolated/scattered will be joined. Paul expressed the heart that every Biblical leader should have, God’s people joined in His flock.



- *Colossians 2:1-2 NLT* I want you to know how much I have agonized for you and for the church at Laodicea, and for many other believers who have never met me personally. 2 I want them to be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love.

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