Shepherding in God's House

Act 20:28 *NASB "Be on guard for yourselves and for 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.*

Ministers build meetings, programs, and ministries. Shepherds are spiritual parents who build God's family.

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Table of Contents

Introduction **Pg 3**

The Call to Shepherding in the post-resurrection commission's **Pg 4**

Three Biblical Identities of the Church **Pg 8**

Two sides of the shepherding coin: Calling and Caring **Pg 12**

Helping orphans become family through the welcome of God **Pg 27**

Introduction

Any call to leadership in the house of God has an element of shepherding. Why? Because both God and Jesus identify themselves that way (Psalms 23:1-6, "The Lord is my Shepherd," John 10:1-18, "I am the Good Shepherd).

Over the past 50-60 years, the church growth movement, while bringing some positive changes to the body of Christ, has also had its drawbacks, particularly in leadership. It has fostered a leadership culture that often mirrors the corporate world, with a CEO, megachurch, and mega leader mentality, which is a stark contrast to the shepherding model.

God has ordained leadership in His House to resemble a family of shepherds, mirroring the way natural shepherds operated in the Biblical world. These shepherds, like moms and dads, nurture and guide His family flock. The Bible contains about 702 references to shepherds and sheep, many of which outline God’s design for leadership among His people. Moreover, the New Testament employs family imagery to depict God and His people a staggering 1377 times. In contrast, contemporary leadership concepts often focus on “Ministers” who oversee meetings, programs, and organizations, rather than shepherds who care for God's family like parents.

Regardless of our specific roles, whether we are apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, school teachers, daycare workers, parents, or siblings, we all share a common thread: the shepherding aspect. This underscores the need to cultivate God's shepherding heart as we serve His people.

The call to shepherding in the post-resurrection commissions

The post-resurrection commissions of Jesus referred to as the "Last" or "Great Commission." Traditionally, the church only perceives two aspects of these commissions, “go into all the world and preach the gospel...baptizing," and “repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed to all nations" Mk 16:14-15, Lk 24:47. Yet, we need to consider the other two, especially for leadership.

There are four post-resurrection commissions, and shepherding is an essential element in two of them.

- ***Mark 16:15-16*** *And He said to them, "Go into all the world and* ***preach the gospel*** *to all creation. (16) "He who has believed and has been* ***baptized*** *shall be saved, but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.* **(Evangelism)**
- ***Luke 24:47*** *and that r****epentance*** *for forgiveness of sins* ***would be proclaimed*** *in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.* **(Evangelism)**
- ***Matthew 28:18-20*** *And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (19) "Go therefore and* ***make disciples*** *of all the nations,* ***baptizing them*** *in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20)* ***teaching them*** *to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* **(Evangelism, Teaching, and Shepherding)**
- ***John 21:15-17*** *So when* ***they*** *had finished breakfast, Jesus *said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He *said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He *said to him,* ***"Tend My lambs****.(feed, hay, straw, promote in every way the welfare of)" (16) He *said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He *said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He *said to him, "****Shepherd My sheep****.(to tend a flock, rule govern)" (17) He *said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus *said to him,* ***"Tend My sheep.*** **(Shepherding, Teaching)**

The shepherding commissions are born out of His compassion and are part of harvest work.

- *Matthew 9:35-38 NASB Jesus was going through all the cities and villages... 36 Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then He *said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. 38 "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."*

Shepherding is both tending and training.

Tending and shepherding lambs and sheep is a process not an event.

This commission is like a shepherd caring for a flock of young and old sheep. It entails ensuring their diet is correct and their injuries healed, keeping them from straying, mediating any conflict so they do not injure each other, and protecting them from wolves and danger. This is often why, in large crusades, 85-95% of people who "make decisions for the Lord" do not go on in their decisions. Usually, they never get established among a flock of sheep with shepherds caring for them.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel received a prophetic promise of fulfilling the John 21 commission.

- ***Jer 3:14-15*** *NASB...And I will bring you to Zion.' 15 "Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding.*
- ***Eze 36:10-38*** *'I will multiply men on you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities will be inhabited and the waste places will be rebuilt. (11) 'I will multiply on you man and beast; and they will increase and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited as you were formerly and will treat you better than at the first… (22) "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. …(26) "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (27) "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances… (33) 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt… (36) "Then the nations that are left round about you will know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was*

desolate; I, the LORD, have spoken and will do it." (37) 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them: I will increase their men like a flock. (38) "Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so will the waste cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they will know that I am the LORD."'

Ezekiel saw how God would fill Jerusalem and the ruined cities with healthy flocks of His people.

The Book of Acts was the initial fulfillment of Ezek 36 and John 21.

Jerusalem - *Acts 2:40-46 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" (the "many other words" probably had something to with how they responded) (41) So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. (42) They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.. (44) And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;..(46) Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.* They immediately began to live an ongoing way of life as a flock of spiritual sheep in Jerusalem under the loving oversight of shepherds.

Filling Waste Cities—Just like Ezekiel prophesied, they began as a flock in Jerusalem and then spread into other waste cities. As the gospel spread across the face of the earth, flocks of God's people were gathered in cities where they were tended and trained. This is why everywhere the gospel went in the first century, churches (local flocks of sheep) were planted. Sheep were cared for, and they continued to make disciples who matured.

Shepherding is at the heart of the calling of local church leaders.

The two most prevalent descriptions of the nature of God's people are family and sheep. The New Testament uses family terms (Father, Mother, Brother, Sister, Children) 1377 times. The Bible uses the analogy of shepherds and sheep 352 times. These words show us the nature of God, His relationship with His people, and our relationships among His house. These words are in contrast to the term "Christian," used only 3 times, and "Saint or Saints" used 61 times

- ***Act 20:17-21*** *From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church… 28-31* ***"Be on guard for yourselves and for 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. (29) "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; (30) and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. (31) "Therefore be on the alert...*

- ***1Pe 5:1-8*** *Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,* ***(2) shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God****; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; (3) nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge,* ***but proving to be examples to the flock. (4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory****...(8) Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*

Around A.D. 400, famous North African leader Augustine described a leader's job: *"Disturbers are to be rebuked, the low-spirited to be encouraged, the infirm to be supported, objectors confuted, the treacherous guarded against, the unskilled taught, the lazy aroused, the contentious restrained, the haughty repressed, litigants pacified, the poor relieved, the oppressed liberated, the good approved, the evil borne with, and all are to be loved."*

Three Biblical Identities of the Church and their Effect on Shepherding

A Home for the Lonely

- *Psalms 68:5-6 A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation. (6) God makes a home for the lonely; He leads out the prisoners into prosperity, Only the rebellious dwell in a parched land.*

A refuge for Sparrows and Swallows.

- *Psa 84:1-12 How lovely are Your dwelling places, O LORD of hosts! (2) My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God**. (3) The bird (sparrow) also has found a house, And the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, My King and my God. (4) How blessed are those who dwell in Your house**! They are ever praising You. Selah. (5) How blessed is the man whose strength is in You, In whose heart are the highways to Zion! (6) Passing through the valley of Baca they make it a spring; The early rain also covers it with blessings. (7) They go from strength to strength, Every one of them appears before God in Zion....(10) For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.*
- ***Pro 26:2** Like a **sparrow** in its flitting, like a **swallow** in its flying, So a curse without cause does not alight.*

The sparrow speaks of that which is of little worth (cheap sacrifice), and the swallow would talk about restlessness. The sparrow speaks of one whom the world thinks is of little worth. The swallow speaks of those finding rest and protection in the house of God (Ps 84:3 good place to bring up their children). The Hebrew word for *sparrow* means ``a tiny bird." The kind of sparrow in the Word is a lonely bird. *Psa 102:7 I watch, and am as a sparrow alone on the house top.*

Jesus, in contrast to religious leaders, showed dignity and destiny to sparrows and swallows.

- ***Mat 10:29-31*** *"Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. (30) "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (31) "So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.*

- ***Luk 12:1-7*** *Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another... (6) "Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. (7) "Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. Mat 10:29-31*

In God's House, sparrows and swallows find dignity and destiny, the weak find strength, and the lonely find family.

- **Dignity and destiny:** ***1Co 1:26-27*** *For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; (27) but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,*

- **Lonely find family:** ***Psa 68:5-6*** *A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation. (6) God makes a home for the lonely; He leads out the prisoners into prosperity, Only the rebellious dwell in a parched land.*

- **Weak find strength:** ***Rom 14:1-7*** *NASB Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. (2) One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. (3) The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. (4) Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*

A church without broken and messed-up people around it is a church that is broken and messed up according to God's design. The church cannot afford to be separated from those who are separated from Christ.

Martin Luther said much the same in his Commentary On Romans "*we must also have patience with the weak, even those who fail by sinning publicly or by their disgusting morals. We must not cast them aside but must bear with them until they become better. That is the way Christ treated us and still treats us every day; he puts up with our vices, our wicked morals, and all our imperfections, and he helps us ceaselessly."*

Good shepherds give people more than anything else the "gift of presence."

One of the saddest states is not having anyone who loves or cares for them.

- ***Psa 142:4*** *Looking to my right side, I saw no man who was my friend: I had no safe place; no one had any care for my soul.*

- ***Psa 69:20*** *My heart is broken by bitter words, I am full of grief; I made a search for some to have pity on me, but there was no one; I had no comforter.*

When people are going through difficulty, the gift of your presence (just being there with care) is the most important thing. People don't often remember the exact words you say in a crisis or challenge, so don't obsessively struggle so much about the exact right words. It is more about being there to care.

The pillar and support of the truth.

- ***1 Timothy 3:15*** *NASB but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God**, the pillar and support of the truth.***

Pillar - column supporting the weight of a building.

Support - KJV ground - support, bulwark - a wall built for protection against danger.

From God's perspective, Local Churches are places that uphold, demonstrate, and protect or guard God's truth.

Ern Baxter *Through the power in the gospel - not only individually but corporately, that in the redeemed community He may manifest the glory of God to the world! I believe the ultimate form of evangelism in this age of grace is going to be the manifestation of God's redeeming power through the total life of a redeemed community that demonstrates what the gospel can do in every area of human life both individually and corporately. Basically a church is nothing less than a manifestation of God's reign and government in a locality.* ***You must bring the sheep into a community of power and compassion and concern that will attract the world to an alternate society.*** *It is a counter-culture and a way of life that they're looking for. The people of the world have run out of options! They're threadbare! They're worn out! They've got nothing left! Their economy's on the rocks! Their politics are all torn up! Their society's a shambles! The world has no options left! We are the world's last hope (Jesus and His body)! They're looking this way saying, "Is there a people that have got it together? Is there a man that doesn't need a psychiatrist? Is there a couple that doesn't need marriage counseling? Is there a family that can get it together? Is there a community of men and women that can interrelate in joy and peace and hope? Where is it? Give it to us!"*

Understanding the church as the pillar and support of the truth will affect how we shepherd and care for the flock with discipleship. Paul was committed to caring and discipleship.

- ***Colossians 1:28-2:2*** *And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom**, that we may present every man complete (perfect) in Christ**. And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself.*

- ***1 Thessalonians 2:7-12*** *NASB But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. 8 Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.... (11) just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, (12) so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*

Two Sides of the Shepherding Coin: Calling and Caring

Our Identity is as shepherds are rooted in the Trinity (God's family)

The initial creation account shows us that God created mankind in "OUR image and OUR likeness" ***Genesis 1:26-28*** *Then God said, "Let* ***US*** *make man in* ***OUR*** *image, after* ***OUR*** *likeness...(27) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (28) And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

God's image is a relational family (Eph 3:14-15, Isa 9:6 etc.). In the Trinity, a small group (even though They are the Godhead) walks in relational oneness as they carry out Their mission.

While on earth, Jesus' primary base of operation and mission was with and through 12 people He had joined together as a small group in family relationships (Mk 3:14-34).

Jesus prayed His last prayer on earth, asking three times that His church would live in the same relational life the Godhead has (with them and each other).

- ***John 17:11-22****... Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are... (15) "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one....(18) "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world...(20) "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; (21)* ***that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.*** *(22) "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them,* ***that they may be one, just as We are one; (23) I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me,*** *and loved them, even as You have loved Me.*

Paul expressed the same desire that Jesus prayed for (even for people he hadn't met)

- ***Colossians 2:1-2*** *BBE For it is my desire to give you news of the great fight I am making for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not seen my face in the flesh; (2) So that their hearts may be comforted, and that being joined together in love, they may come to the full wealth of the certain knowledge of the secret of God, even Christ,*
- ***Ephesians 2:20-22*** *BBE Built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief keystone, (21) In whom all the building, rightly joined*

together, comes to be a holy house of God in the Lord; (22) In whom you, with the rest, are united together as a living-place of God in the Spirit.

- ***Ephesians 4:1-6:8*** *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, (2) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, (3) eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace... (5:21)* ***submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ...*** Independence is the sin of satan.

The whole story of the Bible is about God's redeeming activity through His people, whom He had joined together as His family. The story can be expressed with the phrase, "God's family of Spirit-filled disciples walking together (relationships) on God's mission." It begins in Gen 1:26-28 and ends in Revelation 19:1-10 with the conclusion of His mission at the great family event, the marriage supper of the Lamb. The Old Testament is about God's family (Adam/Eve, Noah, Abraham/Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and his 12 sons who became 12 tribes that became a nation). The NT is a continuation of God's family in and through Jesus Christ (Mt 12:48-50, Mk 3:14-34, Mk 10:29-30, Eph 2:19-22, 3:14-21 etc.)

TWO SIDES OF A SHEPHERDING COIN (CARING AND CALLING)

Our identity as "God's family walking together (relationships) on God's mission" is guided by the four post-resurrection commissions.

- ***Matthew 28:18-20*** *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (19) Go therefore and* ***make disciples of all nations,*** *baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* ***(20) teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you****. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*
- ***Mark 16:15-16*** *..."Go into all the world and* ***proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.*** *(16) Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*
- ***Luke 24:45-47...*** *(47) and that* ***repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed*** *in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*
- ***John 21:15-17*** *When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him,* ***"Feed my lambs."*** *(16) He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him,* ***"Tend my sheep****." (17) He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him,* ***"Feed my sheep."***

The two that are the most often neglected (The two sides of a shepherding coin)

- **Caring: Shepherding and caring for His people (tending and feeding lambs and sheep (Jn 21:15-17)**

- **Calling: Making disciples and training people to put into practice everything Jesus commanded" (Mt 28:18-19)**

Caring without calling to discipleship produces spiritual hospitals or consumer churches that people use rather than live in as a family on mission. Discipleship without caring produces the Pharisee's house. A good leader cares personally while at the same time calling and challenging personally. When you challenge without caring, it's obnoxious aggression; when you care without challenging, it's ruinous empathy. When you do neither, it's insincere Christianity.

CALLING: Making Disciples Who Put His Word into Practice

Discipleship - The call to follow Him and be transformed (25 times in the Gospels, Jesus calls to "follow Me" only four times "believe in Me"). Jesus' clear emphasis was on following Him (*Matthew 10:39, Mark 8:34-35, Luke 9:23-24, Luke 17:32-33, Matthew 16:24-25, Mar 10:21, Luk 14:33, 18:22 etc.).*

Helping people grow and progress as disciples usually includes five things.

1. Receiving God's word (teaching both conversationally and by other means) and applying it to both belief and living. Discipleship aims to put His word into practice.

God's freedom and blessing come to authentic disciples following Jesus and obeying His word:

- ***Luke 11:27-28*** *While Jesus was speaking, a woman in the crowd shouted, "How blessed is the mother who gave birth to you and the breasts that nursed you." (28) Jesus replied,* ***"Rather, how blessed are those who hear and obey God's word."***
- ***John 8:31-36*** *So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him,* ***"If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; (32) and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."...*** *36 "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.*
- ***Matthew 28:19-20*** *"Go therefore and* ***make disciples*** *of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20)* ***teaching them to observe all that I commanded you;*** *and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*
- ***Romans 1:5*** *through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,*
- **Hard to separate belief and obedience *John 3:36*** *Whoever* ***believes*** *in the Son has eternal life;* ***whoever does not obey the Son*** *shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*

Discipleship isn't information-based but relationally following and obeying Jesus.

- ***James 1:21-25*** *Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. (22) But prove*

*yourselves **doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves**. (23) For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; (24) for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. (25) But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.*

- ***John 13:17*** *"If you know these things, you are **blessed if you do them.***

Whenever the word is shared, we need to think of steps to put it into practice. This is what Mt 28 is about, not just information but obedience-based discipleship.

3 John 1:4 I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

There are three important things to consider when sharing any portion of God's word

- **What do you want people to know?**
- **What do you want them to do in light of the knowledge?**
- **How can you both help them hear from Jesus and practically suggest steps to walk in the word?**

Remember that we are always seeking to put His word into practice in our small group gatherings through the gifts of the Spirit, worship, fellowship, testimonies, or studying the Bible. Here are questions we should always consider in small group gatherings regarding His word.

- **What is Jesus speaking to you with this knowledge, and how will you respond?**
- **What practical step can you take to put this word into practice?**
- **What are you planning on doing with this knowledge?** Articulate at least one step of obedience you will put into practice this week.
- **How will the hearing of this truth affect your life?** This interrupts the consumer mindset that we have in the church world.
- **How will what we hear affect us in loving God and loving and serving others (the two great commandments of Jesus)?** The endpoint of discipleship is our lives reoriented around loving God and loving/serving others.
- **What are some of the challenges to putting Jesus' word into practice so we can encourage and pray for you?**

2. Personally encountering Jesus through private Spiritual disciplines (prayer, worship, and Word).

3. Engaging in personal ministry (serving and mission).

4. Encountering and walking in Godly relationships that put the 59 one another's into practice.

- ***Heb 10:24-25*** *NASB and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*

- ***Heb 3:12-14*** *NASB Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,*

5. Walking through Defining Moments that shape our faith.

Defining moments involve pain and disappointment, the death of a friend or family member, divorce, prolonged illness, job transfer, or betrayal of a friend. Adverse circumstances can **damage** an individual's faith or **deepen** it.

CARING: Walking with and taking care of God's people.

Moses and Jethro's advice - Multiple shepherds caring for God's people as they walk together on His mission.

- ***Exodus 18:13-22 It*** *came about the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening. (14) Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?" (15) Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. (16) "When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws." (17) Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you are doing is not good. (18)* ***"You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.*** *(19) "Now listen to me: I will give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people's representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, (20) then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do.* ***(21) "Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens****. (22) "Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you.* ***(It is interesting to note that immediately after this, God identifies His people, Exodus 19:1-7 with the same words Peter uses to identify us, 1 Peter 2:5-9).***
- **God promised to give shepherds to His people who would carry His heart.**

- ***Jer 3:14-15*** *NASB...And I will bring you to Zion.' 15 "Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding.*

- ***Eze 36:10-38*** *'I will multiply men on you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities will be inhabited and the waste places will be rebuilt. (11) 'I will multiply on you man and beast; and they will increase and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited as you were formerly and will treat you better than at the first… (22) "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. …(26) "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (27) "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances… (33) 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt… (36) "Then the nations that are left round about you will know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate; I, the LORD, have spoken and will do it." (37) 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them: I will increase their men like a flock. (38) "Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so will the waste cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they will know that I am the LORD."'*
- **Jesus' heart in working with people in** harvest *Matthew 9:36-38 Seeing the people, <u>He felt compassion for them</u>, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. (37) Then He *said to His disciples, **"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.** (38) "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."*
- ***Joh 3:16*** *NASB "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*
- ***1 Peter 5:1-7*** *Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, (2) shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; (3) nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. (4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (5) You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE**. ***(6) Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, (7) casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.***
- The word **"care"** means **"to be of interest to, to concern, or to care for."** The fact that God is interested in and cares for us is one of the powerful aspects of God's nature that drew us to Christ. He knows us. He cares for us. He is concerned about us. This is a fantastic revelation of the heart of God! This is what broke through our darkness. The fact that He cared for us caused us to run to Him not continue to run away from Him.
- ***Hebrews 4:14-16*** *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (15) For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. (16) Therefore let us draw near with*

confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

The aspect of expressing the caring heart of God was key to Jesus' impact.

Jesus expressed God's care even when talking about holiness and a fear of Him.

- ***Luke 12:1-7*** *Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He began saying... (4)* ***"I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. (5) "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! (6) "Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. (7) "Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows****...* ***22-29*** *NASB And He said to His disciples, "For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on…(24) "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn****, and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds!****...(28) "But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace,* ***how much more will He clothe you****? You men of little faith!*

4 Important thoughts to express in caring for the hurting

All of you are responsible in one way or another to make disciples, mentor, and care for God's people. When Jesus saw people and their distressed condition, it prompted Him to show us the need for shepherding (caring for people) in the process of harvest.

We know that in our everyday lives, our corporate gatherings, and the people we are responsible for caring for, there are hurting people who are in desperate need of care and hope. Even the people who appear to be the strongest are, at times, just barely hanging on!

Because of this, we need to constantly help remind ourselves and others of three essential things about the character of God. God's goodness and compassion are the true north of our spiritual and emotional compass. He is the one who leads us out of any dark path. We need to ensure that these three things about God are at the forefront of our thinking amid the hurt and confusion.

1. God knows our situation.

God knows the good and the bad. Nothing surprises Him. He is aware of our pain.

- ***Psalms 56:8*** *You have taken account of my wanderings; Put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?*

- ***Psalms 56:8*** *Msg You've kept track of my every toss and turn through the sleepless nights, Each tear entered in your ledger, each ache written in your book.*
- ***Hebrews 4:15-16*** *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. (16) Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

2. God cares about our situation.

- ***Psalms 103:13-14*** *Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. (14) For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.*
- ***Psalms 103:13-14*** *Msg As parents feel for their children, GOD feels for those who fear him. (14) He knows us inside and out, keeps in mind that we're made of mud.*
- He knows we cannot handle things entirely on our own and He cares about us. This is a constant about Him. One lie that comes to our mind when we hurt is that God doesn't see or care. We need to come back to the truth that He always cares.

3. God's perspective of seasons and His hope in the midst of them

Life is lived in seasons. Some will be difficult. God makes everything beautiful in its seasons.

- ***Ecclesiastes 3:1-11*** *To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the heavens: (2) a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pull up what is planted; (3) a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; (4) a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; (5) a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; (6) a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; (7) a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; (8) a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. (9) What profit does he have who works in that in which he labors? (10) I have seen the task which God has given to the sons of men to be humbled by it. (11) He has made everything beautiful in His time; also He has set eternity in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end.*
- ***Acts 2:21, Joel 2:21, Isaiah 2:2, Micha 4:1, And it shall come to pass***
- ***John 16:33*** *"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace.* ***In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."***

Help people know it's okay not to be okay. We don't try to fake it till we make it. We don't try to rush people through the season.

- ***1 Peter 4:12-13*** *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; (13) but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.*

Realize you need God and each other. Moses needed Aaron and Hur to hold up his arms. You may now know what to say but the gift of your presence will speak to people.

- ***Psalms 142:2-4*** *I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare my trouble before Him. (3) When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, You knew my path. In the way where I walk They have hidden a trap for me. (4) Look to the right and see;* ***For there is no one who regards me; There is no escape for me; No one cares for my soul.***

Remind people of God's hope that He will cause good things in the midst of the difficult. You get stronger through resistance training. There are things you have to overcome to become the person God calls you to be.

- ***Romans 8:28*** *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*
- ***Acts 2:25-27*** *"For David says ... (Msg) I've pitched my tent in the land of hope.; (27) BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.*

4. God can change us and our situation.

Sometimes God changes us, other times He changes the circumstances, and many times He changes both. He will move to change. In hurting times we need to reawaken to the fact that God has great power and ability to bring change. We need to encourage ourselves and others of the truth about God's power, ability, and willingness to move and change things so we can move from confusion to hope.

- ***Ephesians 1:18-20*** *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know …(19) and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might (20) which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.*
- ***Ephesians 3:20-21*** *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, (21) to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*

Four aspects of caring and calling all shepherds must engage in.

Healing: Ancient shepherds poured oil over wounds of the sheep to promote healing. Spiritual shepherds also move to heal the sheep through prayer, deliverances, and pouring Holy Spirit anointing over people to bring soothing and healing to their wounds.
Feeding: We are always providing God's word to encourage, equip, build faith, and motivate to live God's ways, which is the best way to life. Shepherds are feeders. Not just preaching messages for a pulpit but sharing God's word in conversations around the dinner table (1 Timothy 4:11-13, 2 Timothy 2:15-17, 4:1-3, Colossians 1:28, etc).

Leading: All shepherds are to lead sheep in "paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Pslams 23:3 etc.).
Guarding: Shepherds are those that guard the flock from wolves who would seek to lead them astray and destroy them. Paul and Peter warn elders of this very thing (Acts 20:28-31, 1 Peter 5:1-11).

- *2 Peter 2:1-2 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. (2) Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned.*

- *2 Timothy 4:2-3 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. (3) For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,*

- *Titus 1:7-10 For the overseer must be… (9) holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. (10) For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision.*

Caring for and Calling God's people in different situations

God's house is a home for the weak and lonely

Spiritual sparrows and swallows.

- ***Proverbs 26:2 Like a sparrow** in its flitting, **like a swallow** in its flying, So a curse without cause does not alight.*

- ***Psalms 84:1-12.** How lovely are Your dwelling places, O LORD of hosts! (2) My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God**. (3) The bird (sparrow) also has found a house, And the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, My King and my God. (4) How blessed are those who dwell in Your house**! They are ever praising You. Selah. (5) How blessed is the man whose strength is in You, In whose heart are the highways to Zion!...(10) For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. **I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness**. (11) For the LORD God is a sun and shield.*

In Biblical times, a sparrow speaks of that which is of little worth, and the swallow speaks of restlessness. Both types of birds were considered of little value. There are people in the world and the church that are "spiritual sparrows and swallows." How we try to help shepherd/care for them is important to their finding the life God has for them.

The spiritual sparrow has little worth. They have no real sense of dignity or destiny. The spiritual swallow speaks of people who have no rest or protection. *Psalms 102:7 I watch, and am as a sparrow alone on the house to.* The Hebrew word for *sparrow* simply means ``a very small bird.'' The sparrow, the kind in the Word of God, is a lonely bird. You never see the sparrow in groups; you see him alone. Both the sparrow and swallow need to find dignity, destiny, rest, protection, and a home, the House of God.

- ***Psalms 68:5-6*** *A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation. (6) God makes a home for the lonely; He leads out the prisoners into prosperity, Only the rebellious dwell in a parched land.*

Sparrows were considered a cheap sacrifice that poor people could afford. Think if you were a sparrow. You would understand that your life was not worth very much. When Jesus came on the scene it meant a new hope for spiritual sparrows and swallows. He brought a whole different revelation of God in contrast to the religion of that day. The religious leaders (Scribes, Pharisees, etc.) emitted an attitude that reinforced that certain people weren't very valuable to God. They quickly pointed out God's standards and people's inability to keep them. At the same time they were very poor at bending down to help people. *Luke 11:46 He said, "Yes, and I can be even more explicit. You're hopeless, you religion scholars! You load people down with rules and regulations, nearly breaking their backs, but never lift even a finger to help.*

A church without broken and messed up people around it is a church that is broken and messed up according to God's design. The church cannot afford separation from those separated from Christ.

God's House reflects the attitude of Jesus.

Jesus, in contrast to the religion of His day, offered a perspective in which spiritual sparrows and swallows were valuable to God. God saw their lives and was mindful of their situations.

- ***Mat 10:29-31*** *"Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. (30) "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (31) "So do not fear;* ***you are more valuable than many sparrows****.*

This made a great impact on spiritual sparrows and swallows. God's care came through Jesus' life. It brought a sense of care and dignity to the lives of people who had none. This enabled Him to say challenging, difficult things to people, but somehow, because of His care, they knew He was for them and they were valuable.

When the house of God has a proper heart for sparrows and swallows, we will see examples of people finding strength and stability in their life. It is what many people in the church at Corinth found. *1Co 1:26-27 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh****, not many mighty, not many noble;*** *(27) but God has chosen the foolish things of*

*the world to shame the wise, and **God has chosen the weak things of the world** to shame the things which are strong.*

Helping people (caring for and calling) in 3 different states of maturity

God's instruction shows us different ways leaders approach people according to their situation and state. We see this variety of approaches in the instruction for caring for people in 1 Thessalonians 5:11-15. There are three specific scenarios listed.

- *1 Thessalonians 5:11-15 Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing. (12) But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, (13) and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. (14) We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. (15) See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.*

1. Admonish the unruly: The Greek word "admonish (noutheteo)" means "to warn, caution, to urge to duty, or to remind of obligation." The word for the "unruly (Ataktos)" means "the disorderly, out of rank, or deviation from the prescribed order."

The word *ataktos* was often used in the military sense. When used in a military sense, it had the idea of a soldier out of line, a soldier out of rank, a soldier who was guilty of disorderly conduct, who was insubordinate, non-submissive, disobeying orders, or not following through on his duty. He was out of step. It eventually came to mean anybody who does not do his duty or anybody who does not follow through on his responsibility. Moffit translates it as "loafers". Some have suggested it as the quitters, idle, lazy, indolent, or apathetic. But it does not have to mean just that. It can mean someone who does not do his duty, not only out of apathy but someone who does not do his duty out of rebellion.

In a current sense, it refers to the wayward. They are out of line. They are out of step. Everybody else is going in one direction; they are not. Everybody else understands spiritual duty and is willing to do it. People will do whatever God has gifted them to do. They tend to be behind the church's leadership, supporting their direction. They are on board, on the team, participating, and involved. These are the kind of people that make the church move and grow.

The unruly reject all that. They are out of step. It may be that they are not doing their duty because they do not care; it may be that they are not doing their duty because they are angry, rebellious, or contentious. They are just not supportive. They are not a part of what is going on. Sometimes, they hang on the fringe for a while, and finally, they are so bitter that they leave and go somewhere else. They tend to be the complaining bench warmers.

How do we deal with the unruly? Paul says to admonish them. There is no formula, there is no program, and there is no system. Individual sheep go to these sheep that are hanging on the

fringes and not doing their duty and warn them. They come alongside and as A.T. Robertson said, “noutheteo means to put sense into." Sheep come alongside and put some sense into their heads. One writer says, "It is the idea of coming to someone who is following a path that ultimately ends in serious consequences and instructing them about the inevitability of those consequences."

It does not have the idea of distant judgmentalism or criticism from a vantage point of superiority. It simply has the sense of coming along closely and intimately to show someone the consequences of their conduct and attitude. It is born out of a heart that doesn’t want them to continue in that direction and experience those consequences.

2. Encourage the fainthearted: The Greek word for “encourage (paramutheomia)” means “to calm, console, encourage, or inspire with courage.” The Greek word for “fainthearted (oligopsuchos)” means “feebleminded, lacking courage, or to be timid or full of fear.” The idea is to be “small souled.” The small-souled person tends to fear the unknown. They worry about everything. As William Hardy said, "They see the manure pile in every meadow." They lack courage and love for what seems safe. They only want to walk in a path that somebody has paved. They want a risk-free life with absolute security. They are usually melancholy. They are afraid of opposition, usually sad and/or worried all the time. They often are depressed, in despair, and discouraged. They cannot seem to rise above their problems

To encourage means to come close to their side and speak to them. Out of a relationship with them, we comfort, strengthen, and reassure them. It carries the idea that someone stronger has personal, intimate fellowship with them that encourages them to go forward.

3. Help the weak: The Greek word for “help (antechomia)” means “to hold, to support, and to be alongside (like an ankle splint).” The Greek word for “weak” means “feeble, liable to yield, break, or collapse.” A weak person is very susceptible to temptation and sin. It's almost a hyper-sensitivity to sin. Because of this, they are also very susceptible to the enemy's condemnation.

Paul uses this word, which most often refers to people very susceptible to sin. These are the weak people that you seem to barely pick up out of the hole of sin and get dusted off, and they're back in it again. These people find it so difficult to do God's will. They keep falling into the same sins repeatedly, and you can seem to work so hard, and there they go again. The spiritual sparrows and swallows usually fall into the category of the weak. .

The Greek word for “help” means “to hold firmly to, to hold tightly to, to cling to, to support, or to hold them up.” It carries the same idea of “bearing one another’s burdens.” It is sheep taking care of and supporting weaker sheep. We walk with them, providing external support that they don’t have on the inside. This is an essential way in which we help spiritual sparrows and swallows find rest and dignity in the house of God.

With all patience: Patience is always important in dealing with sparrows and swallows. Patience has to do with not giving up. Patience is the foundational mentality in dealing with all God's people. The word carries the idea that we are patient with people who will try our patience. It is being patient with people who will tend to frustrate us. It is being patient with people who will disappoint us. It is being patient with people who will sometimes break our hearts.

Biblical instruction on patience.

The Bible says a lot about the importance of being patient with His people. There is gentle patience that we exercise toward God's people (especially sparrows and swallows), from which God's strength and stability come.

- **Ephesians 4:1-3** NASB walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ***2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love****, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*
- ***Ephesians 4:23-32*** *NASB and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,…(32) Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*
- ***Philippians 4:4-5*** *NASB Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! (5**) Let your gentle spirit be known to all men.** The Lord is near.*
- ***Colossians 3:12-13*** *NASB (12) So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; (13) bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.*
- ***Titus 3:2-4*** *NASB **to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men**. (3) For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.*
- ***2 Timothy 2:24-26*** *NASB The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be **kind to all**, able to teach, **patient** when wronged, **25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition**, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.*
- ***2 Timothy 4:2*** *NASB preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort**, with great patience and instruction.***
- ***2 Timothy 3:10-11*** *NASB Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, me!*
- ***1Pe 3:4*** *but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of **a gentle and quiet spirit.***
- ***Jam 3:17*** *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.*
- ***1 Thessalonians 5:13-15*** *NASB Live in peace with one another. 14 We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak**, be patient with everyone.***
- ***James 5:19-20*** *MSG My dear friends, **if you know people who have wandered off from God's truth, don't write them off. Go after them. Get them back** 20 and you will have*

rescued precious lives from destruction and prevented an epidemic of wandering away from God.

- ***2 Peter 1:5-7*** *NASB Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, (6) and in your knowledge, self-control,* ***and in your self-control, perseverance****, and in your perseverance, godliness, (7)* ***and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.***
- ***Jud 1:22*** *And* ***have*** *mercy* ***on some, who are doubting****;*

Patience is essential to sparrows and swallows finding strength. You may ask, "How patient do we need to be?" The answer is, more patient than you have been. We are to be as patient as God has been with us. Some may mistakenly think patience means non-involvement. That is not the case. Patience is not passive. Here are some contrasts between patience and passivity:

- Patience is something you exercise; passivity is failing to exercise
- Patience is expectation; passivity is procrastination
- Patience is powerful; passivity is purposeless
- Patience is vigilant; passivity is slothful
- Patience is hopeful; passivity is hopeless
- Patience is faithful; passivity is faithless
- Patience is aware; passivity is clueless
- Patience is obedient; passivity is rebellious
- Patience is a virtue; passivity is sinful

A great example of the difference between patience and passivity is going to a busy doctor's office. You go and sit in a busy waiting room where sick children are screaming and crying. We exercise patience to endure the waiting room because we have symptoms that need to be addressed. Passivity sees the same scenario and would ignore the symptoms because of the hassle involved in dealing with them. In dealing with sparrows and swallows, patience causes people to "ignore the hassles" and wade out into their lives to help bring God's stability, dignity, and hope to their lives.

Calling, Caring, and Consistent Reminding

The Holy Spirit spoke a word in my heart while I was leading a study time with a group of students. It is not what you say to them that they will remember, but it is what you continually say to them that they will remember."

As I started meditating on this thought I began to think on relevant issues from the Word. For example, Bible scholars believe that the Sermon on the Mount was not just a one-time teaching but was a compilation of Jesus' teachings that He taught repeatedly. It was not just what He said on one occasion but what He continued to say. Throughout the Bible, it says a lot about remembering. Paul and Peter both write in the Epistles about reminding. The word "remind" means *to cause one to remember, bring to remembrance, recall to mind: to another, to put one in remembrance, admonish, of something to be reminded, to remember.* Consider the following Scriptures.

- ***Romans 15:15*** *But I have written very boldly to you on some points, so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God.*
- ***1 Cor 4:17*** *For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.*
- ***2 Timothy 1:6*** *For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.*
- ***2 Timothy 2:14*** *Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers.*
- ***Titus 3:1*** *Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed,*
- ***2 Peter 1:12*** *Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed.*

Any involved in caring for God's people understand that they must patiently impart over and over the same important truths. Sheep can tend for forget. Vision is caught and maintained as we call it to mind with people repeatedly. Why do we need to remind constantly? All the enemies of our soul (flesh, devil, and the world's system) war against the Spirit inside of us and press us to forget the truths of God. There is also a tendency to forget God's truth in pressure and difficulty. This is why the Bible speaks of keeping the Word of God within and before us.

- ***Jude 1:3*** *Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*

The letter of Jude was written as a cyclical letter to the churches connected to the church in Jerusalem approximately 35 years after the day of Pentecost. Jude, the leader of the Jerusalem church, wanted to write to the other churches about certain things but then realized by the Spirit that he needed to remind them to contend for the faith they had received. They had let things slip and needed reminding.

There is a danger in Christian leadership, always trying to have some "new revelation" to bring forth all the time. Unfortunately, leaders who follow this path can do this because of a subconscious desire to keep people interested and impressed. It can easily slip into tickling ears.

- ***2 Timothy 4:3*** *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires.*

Leaders and caregivers should never grow weary of reminding. Good shepherds remember that sheep tend to get what you continue to say more than what you say one time. Consistent reminding is more about calling people to do the Word than just hear the Word. Doing the Word is where the blessing is, not just hearing.

Helping orphans become family through the welcome of God

Family is God's organizing principle of life.

The first expression of His people in the earth who would carry "His image and likeness" was family (Gen 1:26-28). The Bible begins with God's family and ends at the great family event "The marriage supper of the Lamb which begins the eternal state of the Bride (God's people) and Jesus together forever (Rev 19:7, 9, 21:2, 9, 22:17). The whole OT revelation of the story of God was the story of Him moving through His family. Adam, Eve, and their family (Gen 1-4); Noah and his family (Gen 5-10); Abraham and His family (Gen 12-50 Isaac, Jacob, Jacob's 12 sons who became 12 family tribes who grew into a family nation); all moving as the family of God. The NT begins with Jesus challing and choosing His spiritual family and revealing Himself with and through them ***Eph 3:14-15*** *For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, (15) of whom the whole family in Heaven and earth is named (name and identity)*

4 important elements affecting family in the first 4 chapters of Genesis

- **Family identity and mission (Gen 1:26-28**): "Let Us make man in Our image and Our likeness...be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, rule over and subdue it"
- **Family Expression (Gen 2**): Life in a relationship in the Garden of Eden, stability of home life, etc.
- **Family Opposition (Gen 3) :** The enemy, temptation, and the fall cause pollution in man and a curse on the earth. That pollution caused the self-serving nature to enter man, which destroys relationships and family (SIN - I at the center, Isa 53:4-6 "everyone goes their own way"). This pollution caused shame and hiding from God and each other, which destroyed the family.
- **Family Dysfunction (Gen 4:1-8):** The pollution in man causes Cain to kill Able out of Jealousy, which releases a curse in Cain that people still battle with today (The curse of Cain).

Genesis 4:5-14*...(10) He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. (11) "Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. (12) "When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you; you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth." … 14 "Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Your face I will be hidden, and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." No rest/home and when you enter into relationships they won't work.*

The idea of "fugitive" and wanderer" is unique in the Hebrew Bible. It means Cain (and those immersed in sin after his) lived a nomadic lifestyle and was excluded from the family unit (striving in relationships). Every time he starts to form a family, it will turn against him. It is a breakdown of the God-type security of family relationships. Obviously, the enemy is behind it because he was banished from God's family before the creation of the earth and seeks to make people orphaned from the family of God ever since (Isaiah 28, Ezek 14). An Orphan constantly carries the internal questions and feelings of.

- I am rejected and/or reject-able I inevitably will be rejected by others
- I don't belong here
- I'm not wanted here
- My contribution is under-appreciated here
- People wouldn't miss me if I disappeared today
- I don't feel valued here
- I don't feel safe in relationships here
- I can't really be myself here
- If others saw the real me, they would reject me
- The old-timers don't accept me
- The new-comers don't accept me or the good things that God did here in the past

God's work on earth culminates with Jesus healing the curse of Cain and bringing spiritual orphans back into His family.

- ***Psalms 68:5-6*** *The God who is in his holy dwelling place is the father of the fatherless and the defender of widows. (6) God places lonely people in families. He leads prisoners out of prison into productive lives, but rebellious people must live in an unproductive land.* A home for the lonely – Lonely (desolate, only like an orphan, no family)

- ***Eph 2:19-22*** *MSG You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. He's using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building.*

Two things that help break the orphanage spirit manifested in the curse of Cain

Spirit of Adoption - The work of God's Spirit as we are brought into God's family through Christ by which we realize we are adopted and wanted (Gal 4:5-7, Rom 8:15-16).

Power of the Beloved (word "beloved" is used 68 times and means "very dear, favorite, esteemed, to welcome, be fond of, to love dearly, to be pleased with, to be contented at or with a thing).

Romans 1:7 *to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

The manifestation of God's "Beloved" instills the following truths that replace the orphan spirit with the spirit of adoption/family.

- I belong
- I am included
- I am known
- I am desired
- I am wanted
- I am cherished
- I am treasured
- Therefore, I become a responsible son/daughter/brother/sister/father/mother. I become a dependable family member. I serve and support the family. I labor to see the family succeed and more people become a part of it though Father's love expressed through the work of Christ.

This is part of the Biblical ideas of "Justification" and "Reconciliation." Justification is God's people being freed from the sentencing and penalty of sin, while reconciliation is the establishment of a friendly relationship (family) between parties who were at odds with each other. Justification without Reconciliation with God and His family is incomplete salvation.

- ***2Co 5:18-19*** *Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, (19) namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*
- ***Rom 5:10*** *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*

Drawing people into His family through the welcome of God

We as a church need to express God's welcome to people. The welcome of God expresses the fact that we and God love people and desire a relationship with them. This is a powerful expression of God's love. Expressing and living in the welcome of God, which I call the life of reconciliation, is part of living as God's family and seeing others become part of it.

The welcome of God is a trait God commanded throughout the Bible

It is associated with God's idea of "beloved."

Eph 1:5-6 *NASB He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, (6) to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the* ***Beloved****.*

Beloved - to be fond of, to love dearly, desire a relationship with, to welcome or entertain.

God wants to take Strangers and Aliens (spiritual orphans suffering under the curse of Cain) and make them part of the family (Ephesians 2:19).

In the Old Testament, the "Laws Regarding the Stranger and Alien" were designed to motivate God's people to move in His call.

- ***Exo 22:21-23*** *"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you* ***were strangers in the land of Egypt...***

- ***Exo 23:9*** *"You shall not oppress a stranger,* ***since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you also were strangers in the land of Egypt.***

- ***Leviticus 19:33-34*** *'When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. (34)* ***'The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.***

- ***Deu 10:18-19*** *"He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. (19) "****So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. (Deu 24:19-22, Deu 27:19)***

In the New Testament it is the call to hospitality

- ***Romans 12:10-13*** *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love;..(13) contributing to the needs of the saints,* ***practicing hospitality.***

- ***Hebrews 13:2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers****, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.*

Hospitality - to be fond of guest, to make welcome

The Spiritual expression of hospitality begins with a smile. Think about the scenario in which you go into an unfamiliar office building looking for help. Once inside, you encounter several desks with people busy working. Some quickly glance up but get back to their work, while others don't even glance at you. Then, one person looks at you in the eyes and smiles. Which person would you approach? Smiling is the first step towards hospitality.

There is a difference between secular and biblical hospitality. The secular goal is to impress, while the biblical role is to express welcome.

- ***Mat 7:12*** *MSG"Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you,* ***then grab the initiative and do it for them****. Add up God's Law and Prophets and this is what you get.*

This means you have a choice. You can be a nice, friendly, approachable, authentic, easy-to-deal-with person, or you can be aloof and appear not to want to make a connection or get involved.

I once heard an example of the importance of hospitality in drawing people.

Imagine you have a flat tire in the middle of nowhere. Your cell phone has no service. You're stuck! So, you walk into town seeking help. Later, you come across two houses on opposite sides of the road. One is dark, deserted and dilapidated. The other has its lights on and a family sitting out on the front porch who greeted you. Which house would you choose? The people on the front porch gave friendly vibes that helped people feel comfortable approaching them.

You can go into the average church and ask, "How many of you are greeters?" Usually, only a handful of people will respond. How sad is that? According to the Bible, we are all to practice hospitality, which means making people feel welcome (by being approachable) *Rom 12:13, Heb 13:2.* We are all greeters everyday inside and outside the four walls of the church building.

We must remember that coworkers, associates, and people in our neighborhood are probably stressed out and dealing with personal issues, health issues, marital problems, etc. Either they feel like they can come to you or not. **If they can see that your porch light is on as you are around them, you have an incredible opportunity to stand on your front porch and minister to them.**

How do we practice hospitality?

- **Make room in your hearts for others** - Starts here with a heart issue. Couples who know a baby is coming to make room in their hearts.
- **Be aware of the strangers and visitors in our midst and make them feel welcome.** One of the best ways to do this is to see yourself as a host when strangers are among you. Meet them and make sure you introduce them to others. Go to them, make them feel welcome, get their name, etc. If we are consumed by ourselves, we often talk to people we are comfortable with and discuss our issues. God wants us to serve others.
- **Realize it is all our responsibility to reach out and make people feel welcome.** It is so easy to rely on extroverts or greeters to make people feel welcome. The Bible says that "every joint supplies as each part does its work in the church." Try to make it early on Sunday mornings or any other gathering because we are all there to minister. Most visitors are on time because they feel nervous in unfamiliar places.
- **Practice strategic hospitality –** Get others involved with you. What mix of people getting together would help the stranger or alien the most. Jesus sent them out two by two. Make your home or meeting place a launching pad for ministry.
- **Practice wartime hospitality**—Nothing is fancy in war—paper plates, Wal-Mart chicken, etc. We aren't trying to impress but to make people feel welcome.

Story about *My First Sunday at Your Church*.

Today I visited your church. I looked up the address, called the church office for service times, and got myself and my three children ready on time.
We're new in town, and this is the fourth church we've visited. We step inside, hopeful. Perhaps here I'll find help teaching the Word to our children. Perhaps here we'll grow spiritually. Or maybe we'll receive the same welcome we got at the other churches.

"Good morning! And isn't it a fantastic day!" says the greeter, handing us programs. "Yes. I'm so glad it's cooling off." "Are you visiting?" he asks. "Yes. We just moved here." "Isn't that grand!" he says, stepping back and looking over our shoulders. "Mr. Charlie! And how are you today?" Everyone has taken the same greeter class. Again and again, someone offers a limp hand, saying, "I'm so glad you came," without smiling at all, quickly moving on, job finished. I am itching to ask about the women's Bible study, choir practice, and Sunday school. But then they're gone, chatting with a good friend in the next pew.

After wandering around between Sunday school and church, trying to find a door to the sanctuary that doesn't open into the choir pit, we're late. The sanctuary is nearly full, but there's one empty row—at the very front. So we walk past hundreds of eyes, "new people" on parade. As we settle the kids, a lady on the end whispers to someone behind her, "I just don't know where John and Steve are going to sit now." I chose the deacons' row. I cringe and turn, searching for another pew to move my family to, but the place is packed and the music is starting. After the service, I buckle my children into the car, pile the take-home papers and Bibles on the dash, and I start to cry.

This is a true story. I have visited four churches over the last three months, and I am frustrated and disheartened enough to quit church altogether. Why has it been so difficult to find a church home?

I have been an active church member, someone people called for counsel and prayer, someone my pastor called if he needed help with a project. We're in a new town, and I don't mind starting over. And the new church doesn't have to be just like the one back home. But, I think, we should be made to feel welcome.

Leaders help make every interaction full of God's welcome. It is not only about being warm and inviting yourself but continually motivating God's people to have God's welcome in them, cooperating with the Holy Spirit to see the curse of Cain broken off people's lives.