

## **Feed and Guide My Sheep**

*"So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord: thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me: And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep (John 21:15-17)."*

### **Saved to Serve**

The title of this presentation comes from the words that Jesus spoke to Peter on the shore of the sea of Tiberius. Jesus was soon to ascend to be with the Father in Heaven. His disciples would be left to carry on His work. Jesus instructed His disciples to serve Him in continuing the work of God's Kingdom. As followers of Jesus, we have been saved to serve.

Jesus instructed Peter to feed and guide His flock. In repeating this instruction three times to Simon Peter, Jesus prefaced His instruction each time with the same question. It is a very important question. Jesus asked, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Serving the Lord Jesus begins with love for Him. John writes, "'Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments (1 John 5:1)."

### **Tending the Flock**

Three times Peter affirmed his love for Jesus. Each time Jesus instructed Peter to tend the flock, saying "feed my lambs" and "feed my sheep." The work of the shepherd is in question. Peter would later write to other workers in the Kingdom, "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock (1 Peter 5:1-3)."

Apostle Paul very preciously instructed the elders in the congregation at Ephesus, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28)."

It is clear that the Kingdom is God's and the work is God's. He guides; He protects; He feeds and gives increase. He has, nonetheless, entrusted the feeding and guiding of the flock to His servants.

Paul reminded the Ephesians in his letter that God works through many and various gifts to strengthen and unite His flock. He wrote that God "gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12)."

## **Feeding and Guiding**

How is the flock of the Good Shepherd guided and fed? It is done through the distributing of God's Word. His word, the complete gospel, is our bread and water of life. It is from His word that the flock is fed. God's Word is also a light that guides us on the right pathway.

For that reason, the servants of the Chief Shepherd need to be faithful to God's Word. We need to be students of God's Word and of doctrine. We need to understand and to help the congregation to understand that the guide, the yardstick, the highest authority is God's Word and not the word or understanding or opinions of people in positions of trust. We need to endeavor to sow the seeds of God's Word in a spirit of grace and truth, without respect of persons, according to the love of Christ, and with love for the undying soul.

This feeding and guiding is for the sake of the entire flock. All are in the care of the Good Shepherd. All need the nourishment of the gospel. All need the guidance of God's Word. The Shepherd's Psalm is the psalm of every believer.

## **Feed My Lambs**

In His instructions to Peter, Jesus directed special attention to caring for the lambs in His flock. In our time, God's Kingdom has seen a special need to do this feeding and guiding work among our children and youth.

The scriptures warn us about the deceitfulness of the end times. Apostle Paul wrote, "... in the last days perilous times shall come (1 Tim. 3:1)." Thinking of the kingdom as a flock of sheep, each of which is weak and defenseless on its own, Peter wrote, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8)." And who here does not remember the temptations of youth? Our youth need our support. In this, the role of believing parents is key. However, there are temptations also for the parents. So, there is a need today that we would support, instruct and encourage the parents also.

The work in the believing home is for the sake of the rising generation. The psalmist has written, "For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments (Psalm 78:5 -7)."

Even in the believing home, the focus of daily life can easily shift away from the right priority. Think of the exhortation of Moses in contrast to our daily lives. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I

command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates (Deut. 6:5-9)."

Our parents need the support of the Kingdom of God. The Good Shepherd wants to help and to guide the parents as well as the youth. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young (Isaiah 40:11)."

### **Supporting the Parents**

Laestadius compared the duty of those who serve as pastors or elders in God's Kingdom to the role of sheep dogs that help the shepherd. If the sheep dog is faithful and loyal, he helps the shepherd to guide the flock in the direction the Shepherd wants the flock to travel. He helps to keep the flock together, to bring the straying ones back into the security of the flock, and to protect the sheep and lambs from their enemies.

How do we as pastors and board members help the Shepherd in gently leading those that are with young? What can and should we do to support and help our parents in their precious duty? On this question, we could have much discussion. It gets to the core of the duties of those who serve the congregation. I will briefly mention a few things that can be discussed and expanded further.

- We should speak openly and freely about sin and the dangers of our time.
- We should speak about the caretaking of the conscience, about washing one another's feet (also in our homes and families), about confession and its proper use.
- We should speak about being our brother's keeper.
- We should be aware of conditions among our youth (and parents). This does not mean that we are watching or looking for faults or problems, but rather that we would be following the instruction of Jesus to feed and guide the flock, as Peter instructs, not as lords over the flock but as examples.
- We should approach those who are in need of guidance or help personally and directly, caring for matters in the smallest group possible.
- We should arrange parent evenings, youth activities and home services or discussions where the focus is on faith.
- We should encourage and communicate with our youthworkers and Sunday school and day circle teachers.
- We should be students of the scriptures and foster this with the parents and youth.

- We should help the parents to understand their duties and encourage them to not weary in the work of rearing their children and sowing the seed of God's word.

On this last point, we could discuss some of the matters that touch on the sowing work of the parents.

### **The Duty of Parents**

Time does not permit dealing with the duty of parents in an exhaustive manner. And this is not a parents evening. However, there are those things that we should discuss with our parents and foster within our home congregations.

- First and foremost is the care of the gospel. Believing the gospel personally and preaching it in our homes is of utmost importance. The gospel, that is release from sin, is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). Without this forgiveness we cannot remain believing. Forgiveness is the manna of Heaven, that feeds our souls.
- In our homes there should be openness in speaking about matters and also mutual respect.
- Parents should always remember the importance of thanks and praise. It is good to recognize good behavior, helpfulness and those things that we want to encourage in our children.
- It is important that between the parents there is a common understanding in the rearing and instructing of the children.
- The parents and the children need to all have a part in serving one another in the home. Children need to learn responsibility and helping in the home duties.
- Family time is critical. The family can discuss both matters of daily life and also matters pertaining to the way of faith.
- Parents need to be aware of their children's lives - their activities, their difficulties, their needs.
- The focus of the parents should be on home life.
- It would be good to foster prayer to God in the lives of the children and family.
- Instruct the youth in timely and basic matters such as keeping appropriate hours (we are not children of the night nor of darkness), avoiding worldly dress and styles, obedience to parents and the laws of our land (for example in such matters as tobacco use), the dangers of television, alcohol and drugs, videos and the Internet, improper sexuality, birth control or family planning, worldly music, and competitive sports. Those matters that are sin should be clearly taught as sin to our children.

- Parents should foster responsibility in the work of God's Kingdom, whether it be in helping in the work of the congregation, financial support for the work, or other responsibilities.
- We should speak positively to our children about the Kingdom of God and its preciousness.
- We need to remember the instruction of Apostle Paul, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another (Col. 3:12-13)."

Each of these points could provide food for discussion with the parents in our home congregations. The precious calling and duty of parents is so very important in these last evil times. Jesus still desires to "gather the lambs with his arm and carry them in his bosom."

### **The Flock of the Good Shepherd**

The believers are sheep in the flock of the Good Shepherd. Jesus said of himself, "I am the good shepherd and know my sheep, and am known of mine (John 10:14). "About the shepherd, He said, "... the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice (John 10:3-4)."

We live in a time when we see both the results of the work of the enemy of souls in this world and the great blessings of God in His kingdom. Today we are blessed with many sincerely believing young parents, youth and children. God's Kingdom has experienced growth from within. We have also experienced how the Good Shepherd yet seeks lost sheep in this world. It is truly a blessed time that we are living in God's kingdom.

Yet, we remember the warnings of scripture. Paul's words to the Ephesians are certainly appropriate for today. "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil (Eph. 5:15-16)." In the letter to Hebrews, we read, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Heb. 10:23-25).

Now in conclusion, I would like to read a very familiar portion of scripture. But as you listen to these words, I want you to create an image in your mind. Picture stretching out before you a beautiful green pasture. In the midst of this pasture, picture a spring of fresh clear water. Now place into this picture a flock of sheep and lambs, some grazing, some resting, some drinking from the spring. And tending the flock, do you see the shepherd with his staff? Now place yourself as one of the sheep in this pasture as we hear these words:

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:  
He leadeth me beside the still waters.  
He restoreth my soul:  
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.  
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;  
Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.  
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:  
Thou anointest my head with oil;  
My cup runneth over.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:  
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

*Psalm 23.*

Jim Frantti  
7/6/01