

HWMR: EXPERIENCING, ENJOYING, AND EXPRESSING CHRIST (3)
(Week 10)

Shepherding according to God

Scripture Reading: *John 21:15-17; 10:9-17; 1 Pet. 5:2, 4; 2:25; Heb. 13:20*

- John 21:15 Then when they had eaten 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.
- John 21:16 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.
- John 21:17 He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me? Peter was grieved that 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, Feed My sheep.
- John 10:9 I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved and shall go in and go out and shall find pasture.
- John 10:10 The thief does not come except to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly.
- John 10:11 I am the good Shepherd; the good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.
- John 10:12 He who is a hireling and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.
- John 10:13 He flees because he is a hireling and it does not matter to him concerning the sheep.
- John 10:14 I am the good Shepherd, and I know My own, and My own know Me,
- John 10:15 Even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.
- John 10:16 And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must lead them also, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one flock, one Shepherd.
- John 10:17 For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.
- 1 Pet 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not under compulsion but willingly, according to God; not by seeking gain through base means but eagerly;
- 1 Pet 5:4 And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.
- 1 Pet 2:25 For you were like sheep being led astray, but you have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.
- Heb 13:20 Now the God of peace, He who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, in the blood of an eternal covenant,

Day 1

John 21:15-17 - ...Jesus said to Simon Peter, ...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...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...Simon, son of John, do you love Me? ...And he said to Him, Lord, ...You know that I love You. Jesus said to him, Feed My sheep.

- I. **Shepherding is to take all-inclusive tender care of the flock; shepherding refers to taking care of all the needs of the sheep—John 21:15-17; Acts 20:28.**
- II. **The two basic elements of shepherding are cherishing and nourishing—Eph. 5:29:**

- A. To shepherd is to **comfort**, to **soothe**, to **nurture** with tender love, and to foster with tender care.
- B. In shepherding others, we should **first cherish** them to make them happy, and **then we should nourish** them.

Shepherding is to take all-inclusive tender care of the flock; shepherding refers to taking care of all the needs of the sheep. Concerning this matter, John 21 is a most fitting and wonderful portion in God's Word. After the Lord's resurrection His disciples became discouraged and concerned for their livelihood. Peter took the lead to say, "I am going fishing." Then the other disciples said, "We also are coming with you" (v. 3). They fished all night but did not catch anything. Then in the morning Jesus stood on the shore and said to them, "Little children, you do not have any fish to eat, do you?" (vv. 4-5). He did not say, "What is wrong with you? You are professional fishermen, and you were fishing at the best time. Why didn't you catch anything?" The disciples probably had not eaten for some time, and so they probably were hungry. Jesus said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." Then the disciples caught an abundance of fish. The apostle John recognized that it was the Lord who was speaking to them, and Peter threw himself into the sea. When the disciples got onto the land, they saw that there was a fire of coals with some fish lying on it. Jesus said to them, "**Come and have breakfast**" (v. 12).

According to this record in John 21, we may say that Peter was backsliding. He was discouraged and anxious about his livelihood. It was at this point that Jesus invited Peter and the other disciples to have breakfast. Jesus did not expose Peter's failure or reprimand him, saying, "What is wrong with you? I called you, Peter. You should have been faithful. Now you are backsliding." In our care for people, we may often have a critical or rebuking attitude toward them. We need to consider **how the Lord shepherded His disciples**. He invited them to have breakfast **without even touching their failures**. This shows us the Lord's **tenderness in His shepherding**. His disciples were in a state of discouragement. They did not know how to go on, and they were tempted to go back to the world. It was in this kind of situation that the Lord expressed His tender care in His shepherding of them. Then, after the disciples had finished breakfast, Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him; this restored Peter's love for Him. Then He told Peter to feed His lambs, shepherd His sheep, and feed His sheep (vv. 15-17). (*The Ministry of the Word, chapter 34*)

Day 2

1 Pet. 5:2-4 - Shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not under compulsion but willingly, according to God; not by seeking gain through base means but eagerly; nor as lording it over your allotments but by becoming patterns of the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Day 3

1 Cor. 12:23-25 - And those members of the body which we consider to be less honorable, these we clothe with more abundant honor; ...but our comely members have no need. But God has blended the body together, giving more abundant honor to the member that lacked, that there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same care for one another.

III. In the Lord's recovery today there is an **urgent need of shepherding— John 21:16; 1 Pet. 5:2, 4:**

- A. The **greatest lack** among us is in the **matter of shepherding**.
- B. In His organic salvation God the Father first regenerates us by God the Spirit and then shepherds us in God the Son as our Shepherd that we may exist and grow in His life for eternity—1:3; John 10:11; Rev. 7:17.
- C. Shepherding the believers is crucial for their **growth in the divine life unto maturity** for the **building up of the Body of Christ**—Eph. 4:13-16.
- D. The shepherding that builds up the Body of Christ is a **mutual shepherding**—1 Cor. 12:23-26:
 - 1. **All believers**, regardless of their stage of spiritual growth, **need shepherding**; we all have defects and shortcomings and need others to shepherd us.
 - 2. We need to be under the **organic shepherding** of Christ and to be one with Him to shepherd others—John 10:11, 16; Heb. 13:20-21; 1 Pet. 5:4; 2:25.
 - 3. **We are both sheep and shepherds**, shepherding and being shepherded in mutuality; through this shepherding, the church is built up into the Body of Christ—Heb. 5:14; Eph. 4:12-13.
- E. The more we are **constituted with Christ**, the more we will spontaneously **live a shepherding life** and have the burden to take care of others—Col. 1:27; 3:10-11, 14:
 - 1. The constitution of Christ in our spiritual life has a shepherding aspect—John 21:15-17.
 - 2. Shepherding is not a matter of responding to being encouraged by others to shepherd.
 - 3. Shepherding is the **issue of being constituted with Christ**—Col. 3:4, 10-11.
 - 4. The part of our being that has been constituted with Christ is the **part that shepherds others**.
 - 5. We cannot shepherd anyone; the **Christ constituted into us is the Shepherd**—John 10:11; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:2, 4; Heb. 13:20.
- F. We need to shepherd the flock of God according to the **loving and tender heart of our Father** God and according to the **seeking and shepherding Spirit of our Savior Christ**—Luke 15:1-32:
 - 1. We need to shepherd one another **in love**—1 Cor. 13:1-13.
 - 2. **Love is the most excellent way** for us to be anything and to do anything—12:31b:
 - a. God has given us a spirit of love—2 Tim. 1:7.
 - b. Since God is love and since we have been regenerated by God to be His species, we should be love—1 John 4:8; John 3:6.
 - 3. The Body of Christ **builds up itself in love**—Eph. 4:16.

The first part of the group meeting is primarily a time of **singing, praising, and praying**. This spontaneously brings us into **fellowship**. For example, one brother may pray for another brother who is sick and who has lost his job. Such prayer opens a window for the group to fellowship concerning the sick brother. Perhaps, immediately after the prayer, another brother would ask, “Brother, could you please tell us what kind of occupation this brother has?” The brother may respond by saying, “He came from China to this country two years ago and has been working in a certain firm as a bookkeeper.” This little conversation is an example of fellowship.

Following such fellowship comes **intercession**. Some of the brothers in the group may begin to pray for the brother to get a job. Then the following week, one of the brothers may find out that there is an opening for bookkeepers in his company. He may then go to the group meeting and ask for a resumé that he could present to his company. This is an example of **practical care**.

After fellowship, intercession, and practical care, **shepherding follows**. Some in the group may find out that one of the saints is sick at home or in the hospital. After some fellowship, two of the group may decide to go to visit the sick brother or sister. This is shepherding visitation. Spontaneously, all the things which are so necessary for taking care of the saints—**fellowship, intercession, proper care, and shepherding**—could be and should be done in every group meeting.

The matters of fellowship, intercession, practical care, and shepherding can easily be carried out in the group meetings. But because we are short of the group meetings, we are also very short of these things in the church life. We come together, but our coming together is **not** very practical. We **perform as actors** in a religious service, but **do not care** for the practical matters. We call hymns, but they have **little** to do with anything of fellowship or intercession. We may speak things which have little to do with practical care, or we may propose things which have **little** to do with shepherding. We talk a great deal, but there is very little fellowship, intercession, practical care, or shepherding. The result is that we **waste** our time and do very little to take care of the saints, to perfect them, or to build them up. Often we do a lot of **religious things** which have nothing to do with the actual, practical situation of the saints. For this reason, I feel burdened to **fight against the oldness, the religious concepts, and the dispositions of the saints**, including my own. (*The Exercise and Practice of the God-Ordained Way, Chapter 27*)

Day 4

John 10:11 - I am the good Shepherd; the good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

1 Pet. 2:25 - For you were like sheep being led astray, but you have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

IV. Christ is the **good Shepherd, the great Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd, and the Shepherd of our souls**—John 10:9-17; Heb. 13:20-21; 1 Pet. 5:4; 2:25:

- A. As the **good Shepherd**, the Lord Jesus came that **we may have life and may have it abundantly**—John 10:10-11:
 1. He **laid down His soul-life**, His human life, to accomplish redemption for His sheep that they may share His zoe life, His divine life—vv. 11, 15, 17.
 2. **He leads His sheep** out of the fold into Himself as the pasture, the feeding place, where they may eat freely of Him and be nourished by Him—v. 9.
 3. The Lord has **formed** the Jewish and Gentile believers **into one flock** (the church, the Body of Christ) under His shepherding—v. 16.
- B. **God raised up from the dead** “our Lord Jesus, the **great Shepherd** of the sheep, in the blood of an eternal covenant”—Heb. 13:20:
 1. The eternal covenant is to consummate the New Jerusalem by **shepherding**.
 2. The eternal covenant is the covenant of the new testament to gain a flock, which is the church issuing in the Body of Christ and consummating in the New Jerusalem.
- C. As the **Chief Shepherd**, Christ shepherds His flock **through the elders** of the churches—1 Pet. 5:4:
 1. **Without** the elders’ shepherding, the church **cannot** be built up.
 2. The elders’ shepherding should be Christ shepherding through them.
- D. As the **Shepherd of our souls**, the pneumatic Christ **oversees** our inward condition, **caring for** the situation of our inner being—2:25:

1. He shepherds us by caring for the welfare of our soul and by **exercising His oversight** over the condition of our inner being.
2. Because our soul is very complicated, **we need Christ**, who is the life-giving Spirit **in our spirit**, to shepherd us in our soul, to take care of our mind, emotion, and will and of our problems, needs, and wounds.

In John 21:15 the Lord said to Peter, “Feed My lambs”; in verse 16, “Shepherd My sheep”; and in verse 17, “Feed My sheep.” Here the Lord seemed to be saying, “Peter, since you love Me, you should feed My sheep. You don’t need to go fishing any more. Instead, take care of My sheep; shepherd My flock. Instead of taking care of your own eating, you need to feed My flock. You should not only feed the sheep—you should also shepherd them.”

Shepherding includes **feeding**, but feeding does not comprise shepherding. Feeding is a matter of providing food to the hungry ones. A shepherd, of course, will feed the flock. Psalm 23 has the thought of feeding. According to this Psalm, the Lord as our Shepherd causes us to lie down in the tender grass, and He leads us beside the waters of quietness. He even prepares a feast for us in the presence of the enemy. This points to the shepherd’s feeding of the flock. The main thing the shepherd does is to take care of the feeding of the sheep. However, shepherding **includes more than feeding**. When a wolf comes, the sheep need to be **protected**. Therefore, in Psalm 23 the Shepherd has the rod and the staff to use in protecting the flock from anything that would cause harm.

In John 21 the Lord first tells Peter to feed His lambs; then He charges him to shepherd His sheep. In these verses the words “lambs” and “sheep” refer to the flock, which is a collective noun denoting the church. **Shepherding is for the flock**, which is the **church**.

Later, in his first Epistle Peter charges the elders to shepherd the flock of God. According to 1 Peter 2, we need to long for the milk of the word so that we may grow. This is a matter of feeding. Growth is for the building of the spiritual house, the church. As we have seen, the church is God’s flock. In his first Epistle Peter regards the **Lord as the chief Shepherd and all the elders**, including himself, as shepherds caring for God’s flock. This indicates that the matters concerning which the Lord trained Peter in John 21 were deeply impressed upon him. Peter certainly received the Lord’s training. (*The Fulfillment of the Tabernacle and the Offerings in the Writings of John, Chapter 62*)

Day 5

Heb. 13:20-21 - Now the God of peace, He who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, ...to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

1 Pet. 5:4 - And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

V. “Shepherd the flock of God...according to God”—5:2:

- A. *According to God* means that **we live God**—1 Thes. 3:8; 5:10.
- B. When we are one with God, we become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead, and **we are God in our shepherding of others**—Rom. 11:24.
- C. To shepherd according to God is to **shepherd according to God’s nature, desire, way, and glory**, not according to our preference, interest, purpose, and disposition.
- D. To shepherd according to God is to shepherd **according to what God is in His attributes**—Eph. 4:18; 1 John 4:8; Rev. 15:3.

- E. In order to shepherd according to God, **we need to become God in life, nature, expression, and function**:
1. We need to be **filled to the brim** with the divine life, enjoying the Triune God as the fountain, the spring, and the river to become a totality of the divine life, even to become the divine life itself—John 4:14; Col. 3:4.
 2. We need to become God in **His attributes of love, light, righteousness, and holiness**.
 3. We need to be the **reproduction** of Christ, the **expression** of God, so that in our shepherding we express God, not the self with its disposition and peculiarities.
 4. We need to **become God in His function of shepherding** the flock of God according to what He is and according to His goal in His economy.
- F. If we would shepherd according to God, **we need to become one with God**—John 14:20; 1 Cor. 6:17:
1. The basic principle of the Bible is that in His economy God is **making Himself one with man and man one with Him**—John 15:4; 1 Cor. 6:17.
 2. God desires that the divine life and the human life be **joined together** to become one life that has one living—John 6:57; Gal. 2:20.

Day 6

1 Pet. 5:2 - Shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not under compulsion but willingly, according to God; not by seeking gain through base means but eagerly.

2 Pet. 1:4 - Through which He has granted to us precious and exceedingly great promises that through these you might become partakers of the divine nature...

- G. Shepherding according to God **requires that we be constituted with God**—Eph. 3:17a; Col. 3:10-11:
1. God desires to dispense Himself into our being so that our being may be constituted with His being to be one constitution with His being—Eph. 3:17a; Col. 3:10-11.
 2. As the Divine Being, God infuses us with His element, causing us to be the same as He is in life and nature but not in the Godhead—2 Cor. 13:14.
- H. Only **those who live God** can shepherd according to God—Phil. 1:21a:
1. God's economy is to **work Himself into us** so that we may receive Him as our life and life supply in order to live Him—John 11:25; 6:48, 57.
 2. We are participating in the divine life and the divine nature so that we can live God in our humanity—Gal. 2:20.
- I. As those who would shepherd according to God, we need to **represent God and function as the acting God**:
1. Jehovah made Moses "God to Pharaoh"; in Moses, God had one to represent Him and to execute His will—Exo. 7:1; 3:16-18; 5:1.
 2. As the **representative** of God, Samuel was the **acting God**—1 Sam. 1:11; 2:35; 7:3; 8:22:
 - a. Samuel could be the acting God because **his being and God's heart were one**—2:35.
 - b. Samuel's living and working were for carrying out whatever was in **God's heart**.
 3. In his ministry Elisha the prophet, as the man of God, behaved himself as God's representative, as the acting God; today we, the believers in Christ, **can be the same**—2 Kings 4:9; 1 Tim. 6:11.

- J. To shepherd according to God is to **minister God to others**—2 Cor. 13:14:
1. The Triune God is embodied in Christ and realized as the consummated Spirit; this is the God whom we worship, proclaim, and minister to others—Col. 2:9; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 1:3-4, 12, 15-16; 2:10; 13:14.
 2. If we would minister God to one another, we need to **speak words of grace, truth, spirit, and life**, ministering the processed God who has been wrought into our being—Eph. 3:16-17a; 4:25, 29; John 6:63.