

Lecture 1

What Makes for Healthy Churches?

Intro: I want to begin by thanking you for the invitation to come and speak with you. My wife and I have been looking forward to this and are delighted to be here!

I'd like to begin by saying that I am not coming here as an expert. I am just a pastor, like you brothers. I am only an expert in being weak and needing Jesus every day! However, I have been in pastoral ministry now for 30 years and by God's grace I have learned some things which have helped our church tremendously.

My goal is to talk to you about preaching and eldering. But I would like to begin by talking about church health. Preaching and shepherding are not ends in and of themselves – they don't exist for their own purposes. They are God's ordained means to the end of healthy churches. We see this clearly in Ephesians 4.

Ephesians 4:11–16 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

God's purpose, in giving the offices of the Word is to "build up the body of Christ" so that people are growing up 'to the stature of the fullness of Christ'. God's desire is spiritual growth and spiritual health.

As you know, there has been a great emphasis in America on church growth. Men are encouraged to spend a great deal of money on the latest technology, sound, music, etc. They are taught how to preach entertaining sermons. And - it "works". You can gather a large crowd when you give people what they want. But the primary goal we see in Scripture is not how to gather a large crowd – but how to help people grow in Christlikeness. The biblical goal is church health.

A few years back, a visiting pastor said that he thought our church was the healthiest church he'd seen. That's the best thing anyone could say about Harvest. But we have lots of problems. We have some division in the body, elders who have left in anger. Some young people who are turning away from the Lord. We are not as evangelistic as we should be. We are not as prayer-dependent as we should be. We have not "arrived" in any way! But this is what we are continually pursuing: How do we become more "healthy"?

What makes a healthy church? What makes health happen?

1. **Jesus** makes healthy churches! There is no technique or program. "I will build my church." The Holy Spirit has been given to the church precisely for this reason. "Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit" says the Lord." But the Spirit ALWAYS uses means.
2. The **Word of God** makes healthy churches.
 - a. By the Word of God sinners are sanctified.
John 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth, Thy word is truth.

c. By the Word of God the church is built up

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

The Word of God is the 'sword of the Spirit' which creates faith, strengthens faith, and preserves God's people until faith is needed no more. One day we will walk by sight. Until then, God wants his shepherds to feed his people his living, active and dynamic Word. It is powerful and able to make us a vibrant, growing, fruit-bearing, God-honoring congregation.

But the Bible wields its power not magically, but as we preach and teach its central message – the gospel.

3. The **Gospel** is what makes for healthy churches.

- a. **Rom 1:16** – "I am not ashamed of the gospel *for it is the power of God unto salvation*, first of all for the Jew and also for the Gentile."
- b. **Acts 20:32** "Now I commit you to God *and to the word of his grace*, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

One of the most common mistakes Reformed churches make is to 'assume' the gospel. The gospel is 'what we already know'. The love and grace of God for sinners in Christ Jesus is no longer the main thing. Emphasis is directed towards doctrinal distinctives, traditional practices. Can be good things – but they are not "the power of God". The gospel 'bears fruit and increases'.

The fruit of the gospel is joy and eagerness to feed on Christ. When the gospel is front and center in the life of a church – you should expect these things to be evident. People are eager to worship. The singing is joyful – people are engaged.

There are two primary instruments the Spirit uses to the gospel-Word to bear on a local church: Preaching and Elders. These are the two things God uses most powerfully to create healthy churches. (Prayer)

What kind of preaching makes for a healthy church? Preaching that is centered on the Word and is focused on Christ. "Word of grace" preaching. Preaching that comes directly and manifestly from the text and ministers the grace of Christ to His church. The word for that type of preaching is "expository" preaching.

I. Expository Preaching – What It Is

1 Tim 4:2 "Preach the Word".

The word for "preach" here means "to herald, to proclaim". (kyrusso)

Hendriksen, "Heralding is the divinely authorized proclamation of *the message of God to men*. It is the exercise of ambassadorship." (H, 309)

The primary calling of gospel ministers is the proclaiming, the heralding of the King's message. Whether that happens from the pulpit, or in counseling, or in discipling, or in evangelizing – this is the core of the ministers calling. To proclaim God's message of all that He has accomplished for sinners in Christ Jesus His Son. To herald the imminent return of Christ to judge the living and the dead. And to urge men and women to repent of their sins and call upon the name of Jesus for everlasting life.

This, then, is the message Timothy is charged to preach. The Christ has come. The King of heaven has conquered the kingdom of this world. A divine order has been issued from the throne room of the King – that all men must bow down in repentance and faith or be condemned. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The promise is that all those who bow before Him and believe in His Name will be reconciled to God and welcomed by the King into eternal glory. All those who refuse to obey the Word of Christ will be cast into hell when He comes again. That is the message Timothy is charged to proclaim. Through this word, Jesus will gather the lost, build up the found, and judge the world. It is an awesome message of infinite importance.

What kind of preaching best accomplishes this task? What kind of preaching is most effective and faithful for us as ambassadors of Christ?

There are a variety of types of preaching.

- Homilies: The pastor gives his thoughts on spiritual, moral or doctrinal issues – with some Bible verses sprinkled in. The Pastor's insights gleaned from the Word.
- "Inspired" sermons – the pastor just says whatever he thinks the Spirit is leading him to say. Loosely based on biblical truths.

My contention is that neither of these are sufficient for the task. What is called for is preaching that comes manifestly from the text so that we are preaching Gods' message not ours – using God's words not our own.

Expository preaching makes for healthy churches because it intentionally brings the very words of God to feed the congregation. It's God's thoughts, using God's words, to tell Gods' story. Expository preaching brings out of the text what the Holy Spirit put in the text for the building up of the church.

II. Biblical Examples

Let me give you a few Biblical examples of expository preaching. One of the best examples of expository preaching is found in Nehemiah 8.

Nehemiah 8:1–4 (ESV) And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. ²So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. ³And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

After Ezra finished reading the law, 26 men expounded what had just been read.

Nehemiah 8:8 "They read from the book . . . clearly (*'with interpretation'*), and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

Notice the progression....they read the Word of God, then explained its meaning so the people could understand it. That is precisely the purpose and passion of expository preaching. When the sermon is done, the people should be able to say, "Now I have a better understanding of that text."

Jesus himself engaged in expository preaching.

- In Luke 4 where he read the passage from Isaiah 61 and explained the meaning of it.
- In Luke 24, while speaking with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we read Luke 24:27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself

Jesus is expounding the Scriptures - and revealing that they all speak of Him!

In Acts chapter 6 we see that the Apostles realized that this expository ministry of the Word was their primary calling, and the greatest need of the New Testament church. When they were being stretched too thin because of the needs of widows, they ordained deacons and promised....

Acts 6:4 we will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

This is what Paul instructed Timothy and all future pastors to do as well.

2 Tim 4:1 "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² preach the word!"

Preach the Word. That's the goal of expository preaching. Preach the Word so that God's people understand what God is saying to them in that particular text of Scripture.

III. Contrasts – Topical vs Expository

It may be helpful to contrast expository preaching with what is commonly called "topical" preaching. Topical preaching is most popular style of preaching in evangelical churches in America today. The preacher takes a topic, usually some aspect of Christian living: money, marriage, stress, grief, etc – and then finds verses in the Bible to use as references in the course of the sermon. The reason it is popular is because it seems relevant and practical. It answers felt needs. "Fear, Depression, Money, Marriage, etc"

The primary problem with this style of preaching is not that what is said is untrue. What the preacher says may well be true, it may even be helpful on some level. So, what's the problem?

1. It places Scripture under the authority of the preacher. Instead of the preacher submitting to a text, he searches for passages to submit them to the point and purpose of his sermon.

- a. Wedding at Cana – sermon on use of alcohol
 - b. Jesus being crucified by “tradition”.
2. It misses the purpose of Scripture.
- a. It treats the Bible like a handbook of doctrinal, moral or therapeutic principles instead of what it really is – the revelation of God and His salvation in Christ.
 - b. Topical preaching inadvertently teaches the congregation the Bible is primarily about them. It’s a book of spiritual wisdom and insight from God to help them live better, more happy, successful lives. But Jesus flatly contradicts such thinking when he rebukes the teachers of the law in **John 5:39**
“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.”

You see, the Bible isn’t primarily about how to be a good person, or how to have a happy marriage or be successful at work or how to have healthy emotions. It is primarily the good news of God’s redemption of sinners through the person and work of His Son, Jesus. It is about the Father’s grand drama of redemption in Jesus Christ – and how you and I – sinners all, can one day inherit that city with foundations whose builder and maker is God.

3. Topical preaching leads the congregation to assume that the pastor is the “spiritual authority” in the church, rather than Christ Jesus Himself! He’s the man with the answers, the insight, the wisdom. A quote from a pastor who moved from topical to expository preaching.
- “When we began to teach God’s Word in a verse-by-verse manner, people came to realize who was really in charge.”

John Piper, “As long as we are circling God’s Word, preaching the latest news clippings, hijacking from online sources, or pushing sentimental self-help fixes, people know (consciously and subconsciously!) that we somehow view ourselves as the authority. However, preaching God’s Word in God’s way proves once and for all who is sovereign King.”

Expository preaching then, seeks to allow Scripture its rightful place of authority, and pays attention to the actual text so that Christ may be seen!

John Stott defines it like this: To expound Scripture is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view. (*Between Two Worlds*)

We have a married couple attending our church. They have no church background. They know nothing about the Bible. They told me that a few years ago, they were invited to a Bible study in the neighborhood. They attended 2 times. The group would read a passage, and then the leader of the group invited the members to share what they thought the passage meant. And that was it.

There was no teaching. No expositing. This couple said to me, we stopped going because we weren't learning anything. We had no idea what the text meant, no one in the group was teaching us. They are amazed, in coming to Harvest, at how much they are learning. Why? Because we are simply expositing the text and pointing them to Christ.

Tim Keller— Expository preaching grounds the message in the text so that all the sermon's points are the points in the text, and it majors in the texts' major ideas. It aligns the interpretation of the text with the doctrinal truths of the rest of the Bible (being sensitive to systematic theology). And it always situates the passage within the Bible's narrative, showing how Christ is the final fulfillment of the text's theme (being sensitive to biblical theology). (*Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*)

Expository preaching is preaching in the service of the Word. In our next session we are going to see how that works. In the third session I hope to show that expository preaching is necessary given the nature of the Bible itself.

In closing, the preaching that is most effective for gathering the lost and building up the church is expository preaching.

Thom Rainer published a book several years ago entitled, "The Surprising Insights of the Unconverted." The surveyed people who had been unconverted and then came to Christ through the ministry of a local church. They asked these people – what attracted you to this church? The number 1 answer was doctrinal or 'line by line' preaching". What they meant by that was that the preacher preached clearly and precisely from the text of the Bible.

Why is that? Because the Bible is the story of **Gods'** great drama of redemption in Jesus Christ. And as we preach that story, that gospel, we will find it to be the power of God at work in our churches. Amen??

Lecture #2

How to Craft an Expository Sermon

Intro: Last night we began by noting that we are called to preach the Word! And I made the argument that the kind of preaching that is most faithful to that command is expository preaching. I appreciate David Helms definition:

David Helms “Expository preaching is empowered preaching that rightfully submits the shape and emphasis of the sermon to the shape and emphasis of the Biblical text...It brings out of the text what the Holy Spirit put in there...and does not put into the text what the preacher thinks might be there.”

I'd like to continue this morning by looking at the 'nuts and bolts' of expository preaching. How do you craft an expository message?

I. The “Path” of Expository Preaching. (draw)

A. A Common (But Mistaken) Shortcut.

Then and thereContextualization.....us and now

1. Just looking for something that applies/relevant

- Daniel in the lion's den – a message on courage in today's cultural climate
- David and Goliath – how to face your giants and overcome them.
 - Ex: What do the 5 Stones of David represent? These five smooth gospel stones represent **personal habits or personal behavior** that David possessed by which he was able to defeat Goliath and if we acquire these five smooth gospel stones of behavior, we too will conquer our personal Goliaths.¹
 - That will preach. It's just not the text!

A shortcut to “application” usually produces a sermon focused on moral lessons or spiritual principles. But it fails to faithfully bring out of a text what the Holy Spirit put in. The text just become a springboard for what the pastor thinks needs to be said.

¹ https://www2.byui.edu/Presentations/transcripts/devotionals/2001_07_10_mcgary.htm

How do we preach a text so that it is clearly God's Word that is being heard?? The first thing is to understand the text!

B. Exegesis

Exegesis studies the text, in its historical, literary, theological context, to understand the one point the author is intending.

Pay attention to the very words of the text, in their immediate and broader context.

- What does John mean by "signs"?
- What does Paul mean by "the righteousness of God"?
- Why does the author use this word and not another?
 - Peter could have used several different words for "reward" in 1 Peter 5. Why does he use "komizo" – to be compensated?

Strive to understand precisely what the writer is saying.

Exegetical Questions to Ask (from Wayne Grudem):

1. The Bible is a historical document. Therefore, always ask, *"What did the author want the original readers to understand by this statement/story?"*
 - Danger of reading Genesis 1 and 2 as though it was written with Darwin in mind. It wasn't. It was written with the pagan gods of the surrounding nations in mind. That doesn't mean it doesn't speak today – but the message it has for today is the same it had then – the primary point is about God as the sole Sovereign and King over all the earth.
 - **Wedding at Canaan – a sermon about the freedom to use alcohol?**
John 2:11 This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.
2. All history can be divided into several major "ages" or "epochs" in salvation history. Therefore, we should read every passage of the Bible with a salvation history timeline in our minds and constantly remember where every passage fits on the timeline.
 - To whom were the books of Moses written? Israel in the wilderness. Why do they need to know the stories in Genesis??
 - When was Daniel written? To whom? Why does that matter?
3. The original authors wanted the original readers to respond in some way. Therefore, always ask, *"What application did the original author want the readers to make to their lives?"*
 - David and Goliath. 1 Samuel 17:46–47 (ESV) (*Have them read it. Ask them.*)

⁴⁶This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. ⁽¹⁾that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, ⁴⁷ and ⁽²⁾that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand."

C. Theological Reflection Questions to Ask

1. The whole Bible is about God! Therefore, we should always ask, *"What does the text tell us about God?"*
 - Daniel in the Lion's Den – is it a story about courage?? OR is it a story about God's faithfulness to save those who trust in Him? What application did Daniel intend for his original audience? (Who were they?). Why would this message be particularly helpful to them?
2. The center of the whole Bible is Jesus Christ (Luke 24). The entire Old Testament leads up to him and points to him, and the entire New Testament flows from him. Therefore, we should always ask, *"What does this text tell us about the greatness of Christ?"*
 - What do the stories of David's conquests tell us about Christ, David's Son?
 - What does the story of David's (and Israel's) failure tell us about Christ? (Our desperate need of Him – And His perfection!)

Colossians 1:28 "Him we proclaim!"

1 Cor 2:2 "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

Spurgeon: "The best sermons are the sermons which are fullest of Christ. A sermon without Christ, it is an awful, a horrible thing. It is an empty well; it is a cloud without rain; it is a tree twice dead, plucked by the roots. It is an abominable thing to give men stones for bread, and scorpions for eggs, and yet they do so who preach not Jesus. A sermon without Christ! As well talk of a loaf of bread without any flour in it. How can it feed the soul?"

Christless sermons miss the point of the text.

Example: Jonah 4:11 And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

Here are his main points:

1. God Cares About Animals
2. God Commissions People to Steward Animals
3. God Connect Animal's Destiny with Human's Destiny

Application:

1. We Should Receive Animals as Good Gifts

2. We Must Honor Animal's Value
3. We Should Study Animals

Is that REALLY what the Holy Spirit was intending to teach in this text?? Wouldn't a much more faithful interpretation and application be God's amazing desire to rescue sinners and redeem creation??

3. Themes: Because the Bible is a unity (it has one divine Author though many human authors), there are many themes that develop and grow from Genesis to Revelation. Therefore, for each significant element in any text, it is helpful to ask, (a) Where did this theme start in the Bible? (b) How did this theme develop through the Bible? and (c) Where is this theme going to end in the Bible?
 - What are some prominent themes in the Bible? (Garden, temple, covenants, kingdom of God, the Sea, etc)

D. Application – NOW, after you've done the hard work of exegesis, you are ready to make your application to "us and now".

- The story of David and Goliath isn't a story about defeating the giants in your life. It's the story of God Saving His people through the conquest of His anointed King. Think of the hope that would give Gods' people in exile. Press home that hope this story gives to us as "elect exiles".

The importance of application! We are not called to pass along Biblical or doctrinal information. We are called to preach the word of God as instruments of transformation! To that end, we must apply the truth that we proclaim.

The Bible itself has applicatory intent.

Romans 15:4 (ESV) For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Since the Scripture itself is designed with applicatory intent, "effective **expository** preaching only takes place when biblical faithfulness and insightful application are inextricably bound together.

The pressing of God's truth against people's lives is the hallmark of true preaching." (C.30)

Consequently, sermons that aim to **inform** aim at far too **little**.

"Preaching that aims simply to teach the Bible aims at too little...The sermon is not a lecture or exegetical commentary on the text with, perhaps a few applicatory thoughts attached. It is, rather, a proclamation today of the *meaning of the text for God's people here and now*. The aim is that, as the biblical text is proclaimed, people will encounter God

himself in a life-shaping way. His Word will be pressed close to their lives, impact their hearts and make a difference to the way they live.”²

God’s people sense this! The Spirit within them makes them yearn for preaching that carries the tone of the Saviors voice. They “know” his voice and long to hear it. They sense that a sermon is supposed to do more than mildly interest them.

“Generally speaking, those who listen to expository preaching week by week want to hear a word that impacts their lives. ...They want to sit under an expository ministry and they have come to church to be fed spiritually. They understand that when they hear the Bible, they should hear God speak and his voice should make a difference in their lives. They want to be doers as well as hearers of the Word. They are not looking for quick fixes for life, but genuinely desire biblical teaching that will help them live well and die well.” (C)

II. Preparing an Expository Sermon

J.B. Charles³

Pray. Start your sermon preparation with prayer. Pray that the Lord would open my eyes (Ps. 119:18) and give me understanding (Ps. 119:34). Do not let this become a perfunctory act. Prayer needs to pervade every aspect of the process. Pray that Christ would oversee your study. Trust the Holy Spirit lead to you to the truth. Seek the mind of God in the text. Repent as the text confronts you with sin in your life. Pray for wisdom as you read. Ask for clarity as you write.

Read and reread the text. Before you understand what a text means, you need to listen to what it says. So don’t begin crafting an outline before you have spent time reading the text. Read prayerfully, slowly, and carefully. Read it aloud. Mark it up as you read. Read expecting the text to speak to you. And again. Saturate your mind with the text until it gets into your system.

Compare translations. You may study and preach from a particular translation. But it pays to read the text from several different versions. It can help you to see the text with fresh eyes. It will highlight words that need to be studied further. And it will further get the text into your heart and mind.

Observation. Start your formal study of the text with an open Bible, pen and paper (or computer keyboard). Just work through what you see in the text. Note long, important, repeated, difficult, or repeated words. Do sentence diagrams. Ask journalistic questions (who, what when, where, and why?) Do “sanctified brainstorming” until you have thought yourself clear.

² Murray Capill, *The Heart is the Target*, pg 17

Perform word studies. You may not be an expert in the original languages. But with all of the study helps available, there is no excuse for you misreading the words of the text. Study word meanings, grammar, and usage. Then make sure you put what you learn in clear, picturesque language, so that you do not drown your people in technical details unnecessarily.

Review the cross-references. This is the Correlation part of the inductive Bible study method. You want to make sure your reading of your text lines up with what the rest of scripture has to say on the subject. *If you have an idea that cannot be backed up anywhere else in scripture, you're wrong.* So let scripture interpret scripture by carefully reviewing pertinent cross-references.

Read the commentaries. There is wisdom in the multitude of counselors. So take advantage of the wisdom of diligent Bible commentators. Don't treat commentators as if they are divinely inspired. But be humble enough to learn from the wisdom of others.

Survey additional sources. Thank God for the Internet! There are many church and ministry websites where sermons outlines, manuscripts, and audio messages are posted. Likewise, there are books of sermons, which may have a chapter on the text you are working on. And there are sermons tapes, CD's, and mp3s you can pick up to hear how different preachers have dealt with your text. Take advantage of these resources to broaden your thinking as you prepare your message.

Develop a Sermon Skeleton. A "Sermon Skeleton" is a statement of your sermon's purpose, aims, and structure. This is where you put your study material together in sermonic form. Pick a title. Identify the doctrinal theme of the message. State the point, thesis, or Big Idea of the sermon in a single sentence. Work through the objectives for the sermon (What do you want the hearer to think, feel, do?). Craft your outline. Write out your transitional sentences.

Write a complete sermon manuscript. If you develop your Sermon Skeleton carefully, you may be tempted to slap an introduction and conclusion on it and declare yourself ready to preach. Resist that temptation. Take the time to write out a complete, word-for-word manuscript. You may not take it to the pulpit. In fact, I recommend you don't. You should prepare a brief set of notes for preaching. But these pulpit notes should be pared down from a complete sermon manuscript.

In summary, your sermon process should consist of several practical steps: Think yourself empty. Read yourself full. Write yourself clear. And pray yourself hot. Then go to the pulpit and be yourself. But don't preach yourself. Preach Jesus to the glory of God!

My practice;

- Read and study the text.
- Read commentaries/ listen to sermons
- Write a manuscript

- Edit, edit, edit.

Lecture 3

Why Expository Preaching?

Intro: We are talking about expository preaching as the kind of preaching that creates a healthy church. Someone has said,

“There are only two ways to lead a church – revelation or manipulation.”

Preaching isn't talking about God – but speaking for God. Being God's mouthpiece to by which He addresses His people.

Romans 10:14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

The point is that people hear JESUS as we preach His Word.” My sheep know my voice.”

The question we are asking now is this: Is expository preaching necessary? I hope I've convinced you that it is preferable. But is there something necessary about it, something that would suggest that anything less is a failure? -We will see that expository preaching is necessitated by the nature, purpose, and power of the Scripture itself.

I. The Divine Nature of the Bible

The confusion concerning the necessity of expository preaching is rooted in a confusion concerning the nature of Scripture itself. What is this thing we call “The Bible”? What role should it play in our preaching? What, if any, obligation do we have to it? The fact is that our practice of preaching rests squarely upon our theology of the Bible.

Most preaching goes wrong right here – a fundamental misunderstanding of the divine nature and authority of God's Word. The ultimate question for any preacher as he comes to the Word is the first question asked in the pages of Scripture. “Has God really said?” It's the very first question in Scripture. In Genesis 1 and 2 - all the account of God's glorious creation culminating in a holy man and a holy woman in God's holy garden – there are no questions, only declarations and affirmations. But then the Serpent enters the scene and his first word reveals his strategy for

bringing God's creation to ruin. His goal was to undermine the veracity and authority and necessity of God's words. "Has God really said?"

That question continues to be asked today. Rob Bell, a famous postmodern pastor, (who began his ministry 1 mile from my house), recently released his latest book "What is the Bible", (2017) concluding that it is a "profoundly human book", no more inspired than any other human work. It is not a book from God. It is not even a book about God. Rather, it is "a book about what it means to be human" (4) and, "a library of evolutionary thought written to deepen our understanding of what it means to live an enlightened life" (281).

If that is all it is – then do with it as you please. It is of no more use or importance than any other human book. Any preaching which begins on this premise is dead on arrival. It is as empty and weightless as the men who proclaim it. Pity the poor man who ascends to the pulpit with nothing but the words of men. And pity the poor souls who listen to him. He is the blind leading the blind.

Praise God, the Bible is precisely what it claims to be - the living, enduring, active, sufficient and authoritative Word of the Living God. This is the great immovable rock upon which the preacher stands.

Peter Adams, "The two great foundations of the ministry of the Word can be summarized in the phrases 'God has spoken', and 'It is written'."

Upon that foundation we have the divine commission, "Preach the Word".

We are not called to preach **from** the Word (topical preaching). We are called to preach "the Word". Why? Because this Word is a divinely given message from God, through the mouths of the prophets, by the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:20–21 (NIV) Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

One of the great joys of being a Christian preacher is the solemn knowledge that when you open your Bible you are reading the very Word of God. This is clearly how the Apostles understood the Old Testament.

B.B. Warfield, "The New Testament expressions 'it says', 'scripture says', and 'God says', refer to the 'absolute identification by the NT writers of the Scriptures in their hands with the living voice of God.'" (Peter Adams, 32)

This is what gives the Scripture its penetrating power!

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Great example of this – Rebecca Manley Pippert tells the story of a ladies Bible Study she was leading on a university campus. She had invited a new girl to join them. This young woman not a believer, was living with her boyfriend, and had expressed to Rebecca that she thought the Bible was just old stories with nothing relevant or practical to say to the world today. But Rebecca invited her to the Bible study that night and she came. The study for that night was John 4, Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well. The practice of the group was to begin by reading the text, each person in the circle taking a turn. By the wonderful providence of God, when it was Sue’s turn to read, they were at verse **John 4:16**.

¹⁶ He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.”

¹⁷ “I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

Sue paused, with a slight blush and astonishment said, “Well, I must say, this is more relevant than I had thought.”

The Bible is the active, authoritative, engaged voice of the Living God speaking. I love what **Herman Bavinck** says in “*Reasonable Faith*”, that the Bible is not only God-breathed but “God breathing”. In other words, these words aren’t simply the historical record of things God has said in the past – but they are the living, dynamic act of God speaking into this world today.

J.I. Packer, “Scripture is God preaching.”

Every word is divinely inspired, and every word has a part to play in God’s glorious revelation of Jesus Christ – the Living Word. This is God’s Word, God Himself speaking. Therefore, the preacher’s task is to proclaim this, to preach this, to exposit these very words!! As **Alec Motyer** has written:

“An expository ministry is the proper response to a God-breathed Scripture.”

Derek Thomas: Expository preaching is a necessary corollary of the doctrine of the God-breathed nature of Scripture.⁴

If the Bible is the very Word of God, if it is truly God speaking – then how dare I do anything other than expound it? How dare I do anything other than carefully study that word, carefully pay attention to its historical context, to its original audience, and to its place and purpose in the history of God’s redemption? If God is intending to tell HIS story and to reveal HIS truth and to accomplish HIS purposes through this book and through the specific text in front of me - then how dare I do anything other than submit to God in the task of expounding and preaching??

John Stott, “It is my contention that all true Christian preaching is expository preaching....In expository preaching, the Biblical text is neither a conventional introduction to a sermon on a largely different theme, nor a convenient peg on which to hang a ragbag of

⁴ <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/necessity-expository-preaching/>

miscellaneous thoughts, but a master which dictates and controls what is said.” (I Believe in Preaching)

Amen! That means that the preacher is nothing, in the presence of that Word, but a servant. He is there, by the pure grace of God, to submit himself to its authority, to carefully discern its inherent, God-intended meaning and to trust its efficacy and sufficiency to accomplish God’s sovereign purposes. He brings nothing to the Word by gifts or insight to “help” it. He is not there to “make” the Word relevant or meaningful or practical. The Word is a fountain of life – he is just a channel directing that water to the flock.

John Calvin, “A rule is prescribed to all God’s servants, that they must not bring their own inventions, but simply deliver as from hand to hand, what they have received from God.’

Expository preaching is necessary because of the nature of the Bible as God’s own Word! We are not the cooks in the kitchen – we are the waiters serving the food.

II. The Purpose of the Word

Expository preaching is necessary because it is the faithful response to the purpose and power of God’s Word. The Bible has a God-given purpose.

Isaiah 55:10–11 “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

John 20:30–31 “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Two things to note:

1. God HAS divine, sovereign intention in His Word. His Word is sent on purpose, on mission. Expository preaching does not seek only to convey the *meaning* of the text, but seeks to accomplish the *purposes* of the text. Why did the author (Divine and human) include this? What does God want us to know, believe, do? Pure exegesis isn’t enough.

The Applicatory Nature of Preaching

- **2 Timothy 4:2** Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, (all applicatory terms) with complete patience and teaching.
- **1 Corinthians 14:3** On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

Since the Scripture itself is designed with applicatory intent, “effective expository preaching only takes place when biblical faithfulness and insightful application are inextricably bound together. The pressing of God’s truth against people’s lives is the hallmark of true preaching.” (Caphill, 30)

Two common errors when it comes to expository preaching.

- **Pure exposition.** Line by line, sometimes word for word, commentary on a particular text. I heard a great example of this just recently. The man spent the entire sermon “expositing the text” – sharing the meaning of a variety of Greek words, and the significance of the grammatical issues. He then dealt with the doctrinal issues at play. My sense was that he brought everything he learned in the study into the pulpit – and then concluded “May the Lord bless this exposition of his word”. My concern was not that it was not expository – but that it was not preaching. It ‘expounded’ but did not explain, did not bring the truths of the text to bear on the lives of the congregation. It was all true – but it he didn’t explain why any of it mattered. “So What?”
- “Timeless Principles”: Another popular method of expository preaching makes the opposite error. It looks for timeless truths or principles in the text at hand which can then be applied directly to the believer’s life today. (As an example: I heard a man preach a sermon on 1 Samuel 17, the story of David and Goliath. He paid attention to the text – but he was looking for a “timeless principle” to apply. He believed that the “timeless principle” of the text was that, just like David was not afraid in the presence of Goliath, we do not need to be afraid when we are faced with the ‘giants in our lives’, the problems that we face.) Now, it is true that we do not need to be afraid. The Bible tells us this many times. But that is not the point of 1 Samuel 17. The point of that text is “The Lord will deliver you into my hand,.... so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel!”

The primary problem with “timeless principle” preaching is that, much like topical preaching, it acts as if the Bible was primarily about us instead of primarily about the Lord. Those who preach “timeless principles, are looking for ways to bring God into our story instead of helping us to understand our place in Gods’ story.

The great question then is: What is the purpose of this text?? Answer the “So What” question! What was the message of this story for the original audience – and what is the message for us today in light of Christ?

The story of David and Goliath isn’t a story about how to overcome our problems – it is a story about a greater David who fought a greater Goliath, death itself, and is now leading us, the new Israel, into His great and eternal victory. We aren’t being called to ‘do’ something but to ‘believe’ in Someone!

What is God's intention in the Word, in general? How you answer will impact how you preach.

- Topical preaching would be the natural response if you believe the Bible's intention is to give spiritual advice. That, then becomes the preacher's intention as well – and he feels free to use whatever portions of Scripture seem most helpful to that end.
- But the expository preacher understands that the great task of the Word is not to give advice but to give LIFE!

Jn 6:63 The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

Luke 4:4 Man shall not live by bread alone, but (he shall LIVE) by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

The God-given purpose of Scripture is to reveal Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinners – not just their coming to faith, but being built up in the faith. Scripture is not intended to give spiritual principles and moral advice to people – but to bring LIFE to the dead! Only the Word has that power!

2. God's divine intent is always fulfilled. He does not speak in vain. His Word shall accomplish that which God has purposed and succeed in the thing for which he sent it."

III. The Power of the Word

One of the great texts in Scripture for illustrating the mighty, life-giving power of Scripture is found in Ezekiel 37 – the Vision of the Valley of Bones. Ezekiel sees a great many bones, very dry. And God asks him, "How can these bones live?" "You alone know."

"Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army" (Ezekiel 37:1-10, NIV).

This is the power of the Word of God! How shall dead bones live? By hearing the word of the Lord!

Do you recall what Martin Luther said of his experience at the Reformation? When asked how he had done it all, he said, "I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word: otherwise I did nothing. . . .

The Word did it all.”² Brother’s it will do the same in our day. This mighty Word will accomplish all of God’s glorious purposes. Let’s preach it!

Lecture 4

The Elder’s Mandate

1 Peter 5:1-2

Intro: We are talking about how to have healthy, growing churches. I’ve said that the two things most essential to that end are: expository preaching and godly elders. We are going to look at Peter’s words in 1 Peter 5 so that we can hear God’s words.

1 Peter 5:1–3 “So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed:
² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”

In 1 Peter 5 we will consider the “What, Why, and How” of Biblical eldership.

This evening we will be focusing on the “What” – looking at the Primary Mandate and Chief Calling of the Elder.

Tomorrow, Lord willing, we will be focusing on the “How” of gospel shepherding – not looking primarily at what he is to do, but how he is to go about it. What are the things that characterize gospel leadership?

And finally, we will consider the “Why” of biblical eldership. What are the motives of gospel elders? What encouragement does Peter give us? What makes this ministry a joy?

There is no higher calling in this world than the call to shepherd God’s flock. I say that for several reasons.

1. The Great Value of the Church.

There is nothing more valuable in the world than the church of Jesus Christ. Our Lord reigns over all the universe. He has created all things and owns all things.

“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters”. (Psalm 24)

But of all of God’s possession’s, the church is the only blood-bought item He owns – bought with the precious blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). As Peter reminds his readers in 2:9, the church is God’s “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession”. There is nothing in all the world more valuable to the Living God than the church of Jesus Christ!

Consequently, elders have the highest calling on earth. What could be more eternally important than to care for the flock of God which he purchased with the blood of Christ?

2. The Impact of Shepherds (for good and for ill)

This is an important topic because shepherds have a profound impact, for good or for ill, on the sheep under their oversight.

God’s people are routinely called “sheep” in the Bible – and it isn’t meant to be a compliment. Sheep are utterly reliant upon their shepherds because they are inherently defenseless and undiscerning.

Most animals have the ability to either hide, outrun danger or make themselves look imposing and threatening. Porcupines can shoot their needles. Dogs can show their teeth. Even cats can hiss and expose their claws. All a sheep can do is bleat “baah”. Almost every domesticated animal, left on its own in the wild, has a chance of survival. Not sheep.

“A domesticated sheep in the wild is a pre-packaged snack for nature.”

Sheep are born followers – with no discernment!

2005 BBC news report: Turkish shepherds watched in horror as hundreds of their sheep followed each other over a cliff, say Turkish newspaper reports. Apparently, the shepherds assigned to watch the sheep were having breakfast when one sheep decided that it had enough of the world and jumped off a 50 foot cliff to its death. As the stunned shepherds looked on, one by one, 1,500 sheep followed the first and jumped. It was reported that, in the end, only 400 or so died since those who jumped later landed on a massive pile of wool.

It’s a funny story. But what if you loved these sheep? What if you knew their names? Then you would be devastated. I weep when I hear of God’s sheep being injured or destroyed because of the failure of their shepherds. I feel it viscerally.

The funny story about those foolish sheep leaping to their death isn’t funny when you realize that this is what happens when shepherds fail to care for the sheep. People are led to their spiritual death by false teachers. Those who are wandering are left to the wolves of the Word, the flesh and the Devil. No one goes looking for them. Gods’ wounded sheep often have no one to care for their soul. And it’s awful. It’s

terrifying and maddening. God has given shepherds for his sheep to take care of them, to feed them, care for them, protect them. But when those shepherds fail – sheep die.

*There is a reason Peter closes his letter with a special exhortation to **elders**. His concern is to see the church of Jesus Christ, Gods' elect exiles in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, flourish in Christ. He wants grace and peace to be multiplied to these churches – and one of the primary means God has ordained to that end are elders.*

I. The Office

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder....”

Peter is clearly addressing a specific sub-set of his readers. He's addressing elders. And he wants us to pay attention. He “exhorts” the elders, (*parakeleo*). The word has a combination of urgency and authority. Peter wants his readers, and us, to be fully aware of the importance of what he's about to say.

What is an “Elder”?

The Greek of course, is *presbuteros*. It literally means “old”. The Hebrew word for elder (*zaqen*) is derived from the word meaning “beard” (*zaqan*). Elders were historically meant to be older men – old enough to grow a full beard. (Happily that is no longer the case since I would not be able to grow a beard if my life depended on it.)

We first read of elders in **Exodus 3:16** when God commands Moses:

¹⁶Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt,

The elders would have been the leaders of their respective families and clans. They were responsible to act as prophet's, priests, and kings over their family. (Job would be a good example). They are the recognized as functioning leaders of the clans and tribes of Israel.

- They were to go with Moses when he met with Pharaoh. (3:18).
- They supervise the Passover (Ex 19:7).
- Some of them go up to Horeb with Moses and see God's glory (Ex 24:1).
- They join Joshua and lead the attack on Ai (Josh 8:10).
- In Numbers 11, God commands Moses to choose 70 of them, to help him rule over the people.

¹⁶Then the LORD said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. ¹⁷And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone.

The office continues through all of Israel's history. And so, when we come to the New Testament, we aren't really introduced to the concept of elders, they simply show up as a natural and necessary part

of the body of Christ. Luke first references the elders of the church in Jerusalem in **Acts 11:30** when Paul and Barnabas are set apart for gospel mission. In Acts 14 we see that when Paul planted churches, he ordained elders.

Acts 14:23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

You see the elders again in **Acts 15**. There, the elders gather, along with the apostles, to settle the dispute concerning what should be required of the Gentiles who were coming to faith. The New Testament elders, like their Old Testament progenitors, hold an office of spiritual leadership and authority. And so, the writer of Hebrews, writing to a predominantly Jewish church, can say, without any clarification,

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.

Paul gives the same command to the Gentile churches.,

1 Thessalonians 5:12 We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord....

The reason these appeals can be made is because it is understood that the authority of the elders of the church is the authority of Christ Himself. God gives shepherds/teachers as gifts to his church (Eph 4:11), the Holy Spirit “makes” men to be overseers (Acts 20:28), they must be obeyed and will be held accountable to God for their work (Heb 13:17).

One of the encouraging signs in the American church over the past 10 years is the resurgence of the importance of elders for the ministry of the church. Mark Dever, a Baptist pastor in Washington D.C. has started a revival of the biblical teaching concerning how God intends the church to be shepherded.

Dever, “There are many pragmatic reasons why a church might have elders. A plurality of elders can help to carry the burden of pastoral ministry; they can bring a rich variety of experience to bear on the issues and problems every pastor faces; they can hold the pastor accountable in a context of shared ministry; they can save the pastor from a multitude of errors in judgment before it ever becomes apparent in a congregational meeting. The list could go on.

But the best reason a church should have elders is because the New Testament says that it should. Throughout his epistles, and especially the pastoral epistles, Paul makes it plain that every New Testament church should have elders, that is men who “direct the affairs of the church” (1 Timothy 5:17-18). He commissioned Titus to make sure that all the churches in Crete had elders (Titus 1:5). And he took the time to outline for both Timothy and Titus what sort of men should be called to that office (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9)...So central were elders in Paul’s thinking that, though eager to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost, he took the time to call the Ephesian elders together and give them one last exhortation (Acts 20:16-38), the heart of which was that they be faithful as “shepherds of the church of God”.

And, as Peter closes out his letter, he takes the time to do the same. Peter and Paul both understood that the health of the church is, in a large part, dependent upon the service of the elders.

II. The Task

“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you – exercising oversight.”

The primary task of an elder is to shepherd the flock of God.

Timothy Witmer, “The verb, *poimaino*, is in the emphatic position and the imperative mood, indicating that shepherding the flock is the essential work of the elder according to Peter. (*The Shepherd Leader*, 35)

“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you.” This is both the duty and the glory of the ministry. In this one phrase lies all the nature of the work and the weight of the responsibility.

Peter is not listing two tasks here – one of shepherding and another of exercising oversight. They are one and the same thing.

The Greek word for “oversight” is “**ἐπισκοπέω**”. An elder is an **ἐπίσκοπος** – a bishop. The word was commonly used in civic society as well. An “episcopos” served the community much like a mayor or governor. It was a position of authority combined with genuine, fatherly concern for the community. Two ideas to keep in mind when thinking of **ἐπισκοπέω** is genuine authority and genuine concern.

Two quick points:

1. “Elder” and “pastor” and “overseer” are not different offices...they are simply three different words for the same office. In hierarchical church polity, a distinction is made between a Bishop, the head of a diocese, and a Pastor, the head of a local congregation. But that distinction has no foundation in Scripture. Peter clearly uses the terms interchangeably with no distinction. In fact, in one text, Peter combines the three most common words related to the office of elder: Presbyteros – elder; Episkopos – overseer; and poimaino – shepherd. The elder serves the church by shepherding them – in other words, carefully and lovingly watching over them.
2. All of God’s elders are “pastors”. “Pastor” comes from the Latin word for shepherd – ‘pastorem’. When Peter calls upon the elders to ‘shepherd the flock of God’ he clearly has all elders in mind. There is some confusion about this, in Presbyterian circles, since we have two ‘types’ of elders – **ruling** elder and **teaching** elder. It is easy for “ruling elders” to assume that they are responsible for “oversight” and the pastors, or teaching elder is responsible to “shepherd”.

But that mindset isn’t Biblically rooted and leads to problems in the church.

- a) It unfairly places the majority of the “burden of the congregation” on the teaching elder.
- b) It provides an excuse for ruling elders to avoid their clear biblical mandate.
- c) it robs the congregation of the care they should be receiving.

While we **can** make a distinction, as Paul does in 1 Timothy 5, between those who **rule** and those who **teach**, both ruling elders and teaching elders are called to shepherd the flock of God.

So, if the primary task is “to shepherd” the flock, if this is the essential calling so that failure to do this is failure as an elder - then we need to understand clearly what this means. What does it mean to be a shepherd of Gods’ flock? Once again, we will be well-served to review the rich Biblical theology behind this mandate.

God’s people are sheep. God created us as sheep – as dependent creatures. Psalm 100 calls us to make a joyful noise to the Lord. Why? “For we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.” God’s people are always sheep – they don’t mature into something else. In fact, we will be sheep for all eternity. Jesus didn’t die to make us into lions or bears. God, in his infinite wisdom, has determined to form us as sheep – people who will eternally need a shepherd!

Just as God has determined to make us sheep, he has determined to lead us with shepherds: men specifically called and gifted to lead, feed and protect God’s precious sheep. The role of an elder is well summarized by Alexander Strauch in his book *Biblical Eldership*:

- “Elders rule over the church - [1 Tim 5:17](#);
- teach and preach the Word - [2 Timothy 4:2](#); [Titus 1:9](#)],
- protect the church from false teachers [[Acts 20:17](#), [28–31](#)],
- exhort and admonish the saints in sound doctrine [[1 Tim 4:13](#); [2 Tim 3:13f](#); [Titus 1:9](#)],
- visit the sick and pray [[James 5:14](#); [Acts 6:4](#)],
- and judge doctrinal issues [[Acts 15:6](#)]. (*Biblical Elders*, 16).

A helpful summary is to say that Gods’ shepherds are called to lead, feed and care for the flock.

God’s Shepherd’s Lead the flock. God’s sheep need to be lead. It has always been this way.

- Moses lead the people out of Egypt.
- Joshua lead them into the land.
- Samuel lead them in the days leading up to the monarchy.
- David lead them as there King.
- Nehemiah lead the captives back to Jerusalem.

God’s shepherd-leaders are specific men, in a particular time and place, who have a vision, a clear sense, gathered from Gods’ Word, concerning God’s purposes for His people.

Moses had a clear, God-given understanding of God’s intentions for his people and devoted himself to leading them there.

David had a clear understanding, rooted in his understanding of the law of Moses, of what role, before the Lord. He understood **God’s** vision for his people and committed himself to leading them there.

The same for an elder today. An elder must have an understanding of God's will for the church, a sense of how the gospel mission is to move forward; in this particular time and place; according to the Word of God; and then lead the congregation there. One of the greatest failures in the church today is lack of leadership. There is a lack of vision concerning where God wants to lead his church, how the church is meant to be engaged in God's mission in the world. Pastors and elders are committed to caring and feeding – but often fail to consider their leading.

God's Shepherds Care for the flock.

Notice that Peter specifically calls them to "shepherd the flock of God – *which his among you.*" He further speaks of "those in their charge" (vs 3). In other words, he understands that God has called specific men and has given specific sheep to their charge. These are the sheep for whom they are accountable to God (Heb 13:17) and for whom they care.

Elders are called to live with the sheep. Shepherding is a hands-on ministry of presence. It cannot be done remotely. They live *among* them.

I grew up on a dairy farm. We spent our lives with those cows. We fed them. We cared for them. We knew their names, their habits, their needs. We smelled like them.

That's what shepherds are called to be – men who live among the sheep so that you know their habits, their needs, their wounds.

Why is it so essential to care for them this way? Because they are God's own precious sheep, purchased with the blood of Christ. It is a great motivator! There will be times when you want to resign from shepherding. There will be counseling cases that just wear you out. There will be discipline cases that will wound you. There will be times you will be falsely accused and painfully slandered. Why do all this? Why pursue sheep that don't want to be pursued? Why dig into the mess of people's lives? Why risk the flailing hooves of wounded sheep? Why do all the things we are called to do? Because these are the precious sheep of God. We owe God's people that constant recognition and God Himself our devoted service – and God uses it!

Let me quick you a quick example. There was a man in our church named Ron. Ron had a rough background, a lot of drunkenness and violent anger. He had become a Christian in his 20's but had fallen back into the sins of his youth and had stopped coming to church. Ron was a very angry, violent man – and I will admit that I was nervous about going to see him. There was a real possibility of getting hit. So I took one of my elders along, a very large elder who was about 210 centimeters tall – just to encourage Ron to keep the peace. We sat down with Ron and began talking about his sinful lifestyle. He argued with us, disagreeing with nearly everything we said. But we had our Bibles open. And each time he tried to justify his actions, we would go to a verse and show him what the Scriptures say. We showed him that his anger and drinking and self-justification were out of line with the gospel, were a denial of his profession, and that he needed to repent or he would perish. He became extremely angry, and suddenly jumped up from the table and walked out the door. His dear wife was crying and we tried to comfort her. Suddenly the door burst open and Ron came back to the table. We had no idea what to expect – but I didn't expect what actually happened. He sat

down, put his head in his hands and began to weep. He said, "I can't argue anymore. The Bible is right and I am wrong. I want to repent. I want to change." And he did. He became a loving husband and a joy-filled believer. His wife - such a dear, gentle, saint - was overjoyed!

God's Shepherds Feed the flock. They are called to lead God's sheep into the green pastures of God's word and to the living waters of the Lord Jesus Christ. How well Peter must have remembered the mandate given to him by Jesus following his terrible sin of denying Christ. Three times, one for every time Peter denied Him, Jesus gives Peter his calling for the rest of his life – Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.

There is reason why Paul commands Timothy to "Preach the Word". It is the food the sheep need. This is the word that not only informs Gods' sheep concerning Jesus – the Great Shepherd - but actually feeds their souls with Him! Jesus is the Living Bread and Water the sheep so desperately hear.

Charles Spurgeon, "It is ill when a man has to say of preachers, like weeping Mary at the tomb, "They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid him."

There are so many starving sheep in the flock of God. So many congregations who hunger to hear a word from the Lord, who are desperate to hear the voice of the Master – but receive stones for bread, religious platitudes and moralistic principles instead of the "word of grace which is able to build them up and give them an inheritance among the all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

So, friends, this is the calling given to us by Jesus Christ our Lord! Shepherd the flock of God that is among you. May God give us the strength and grace to be faithful.

Lecture 2

The Elders Manner

1 Peter 5:2-3

Intro: Becoming a minister is easy. All you need is spend a few years in school: write some papers, learn some Greek and Hebrew, take a few exams, get your degree and then find a church willing to give you a position. *Becoming* a pastor isn't that hard. It is much more difficult to become an engineer or a medical doctor. But while it isn't that difficult to *become* a pastor - *Being* a pastor, a true shepherd, is the greatest and hardest thing you'll ever do.

Last night we said that there is no calling as weighty and significant as the calling to shepherd Gods' precious sheep. But the weight, at times, will be overwhelming.

I. The Burden of the Office

The first item on the job description of a shepherd is "*Suffering while doing good*". I get that from the first word in chapter 5, the word, "So", or "therefore". It is such a little word, easily overlooked, and yet it is critical to understanding our text. It tells us that Peter isn't beginning a new train of thought here. 5:1 flows directly from what he has just said in 4:19.

"Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will, entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good."

While these words are addressed to the church at large, the word “so” in 5:1 tells us that when Peter thinks of “suffering according to God’s will....while doing good” – he thinks of elders. Why? For two reasons:

1. Because Shepherds take the lead in Trials.

We can see that suffering is on Peter’s mind as he thinks of elders in the way that he identifies himself.
“as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ”

Elders are ‘under-shepherds’ who follow in the footsteps of the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ. This was precisely the experience of the leaders in the early church. Peter and John were among the first to suffer for the name of Christ.

- In Acts 4, Peter and John are arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin.
- In Acts 5 they are arrested again – and this time they are beaten.
- In Acts 6, Stephen is seized and becomes the first martyr of the church.
- In Acts 12, James is put to death by Herod.

We see that the same is true today. Wherever the church is being aggressively persecuted, the leaders usually bear the brunt of it. To be ordained as a teaching or ruling elder in the persecuted church is to accept a calling to suffer. Suffering is an inherent part of the calling.

2. Suffering Is Integral to Task.

Even in the absence of persecution, there are unique sorrows for God’s shepherds. You could almost say, “If shepherding doesn’t hurt from time to time, you probably aren’t doing it right.”

a) An Abiding Sense of Inadequacy.

Every conscientious pastor will carry with him an abiding sense of inadequacy. Gospel ministry will overwhelm anyone who is paying attention, who has a sense of the weight of what we are about. As Paul says in **2 Corinthians 2:16** (ESV)

“For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. **Who is sufficient for these things?**”

Almost every profession in the world enables those who do it right to feel a certain proficiency. As you gain experience and grow in your skill, you begin to feel competent, qualified, and capable. But shepherding is not a profession, it is a divine calling. And, if you are doing it right, you will increasingly feel insufficient for the task.

C.J. Mahaney: Being a shepherd is difficult, demanding, and — if done well — exhausting. Take sermon preparation. You spend hours of hard work over the text, and at some point you review your sermon manuscript and are embarrassed by what you see. Maybe you find yourself tired, confused, and a bit fearful. And you’ll do it all again next week. Then comes the sermon. Ten minutes into the message a terrible feeling seems to confirm that it’s not going well. After worship, you talk with people but nobody even mentions your sermon. Even your wife, who wants to encourage you, says, “Well, it wasn’t one of your best.”

My mentor, Doug Felch, once told me wisely: “Never resign on a Monday.”

Your sermons will never do full justice to the passage. You will never be able to adequately display the beauty of Christ. I often have the sense, when I leave the pulpit, that if I had really been able to communicate the full significance of that text, we would all be compelled to fall to the floor, on our faces in adoration before the glory and goodness of our God. But, instead, we go to the foyer and have coffee.

There will be many times we feel completely overwhelmed and inadequate, as we care for the wounds of the sheep.

I received a phone one night, around midnight, from a distraught husband who had just found his wife, lying dead on the bathroom floor. They had 8 children, most of them still living in the home. Sally was the rock of that family. She was a vibrant Christian woman. And now, in her early 40's, with no warning, she was gone. I was driving to the home wondering – what should I say? Who is sufficient for this?

b) An Abiding Concern for the Sheep.

The Apostle Paul is very open and honest about his *ministry of tears*.

Acts 20:31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

2 Corinthians 2:4 For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears,

And there is the daily weight of concern for the church. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul speaks of all that he suffered in his ministry: the imprisonment, the beatings, the sleepless nights, the cold and hunger. And then he says this:

2 Corinthians 11:28–29 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

You will experience the sorrow of walking with God's people as they suffer devastating heart-break and loss. You will perform funerals – some of old saints, full of years and eager to be with the Lord. And there will be the heartbreaking losses of beloved children and cherished spouses and treasured parents who died far too young.

This is why, when Peter wants to speak a few words to the elders, he speaks to them about their their own weakness – and calls them to shepherd God's sheep in a manner worthy of the calling.

II. The Behavior of the Shepherd: Shepherding the Sheep Gods' Way

In 1 Peter 5:2-3, we find Peter speaking directly to the elders, showing them what gospel shepherding looks like. There are three sets of commands in which Peter first names a particular temptation to be avoided and the countering trait to be cultivated. God's shepherds are to serve:

- not under compulsion, but willingly;

- not for shameful gain, but eagerly;
- ³ not domineering but being examples to the flock.”

A. Not Under Compulsion, but Willingly

God desires ‘*willing*’ servants. The Greek word, ἑκουσίως, (ekousios) suggest purposeful, intentional, deliberate, glad service.

In the church tradition in which I grew up, many of the men of the church viewed becoming an elder much like they viewed being drafted into the military. The general sense was that no one in their right mind would really choose to be an elder, but if called upon, you should be willing to serve your turn. And, much like the military, the day they got in they began counting the days until they could get out.

That is not what God desires! James tells us that men shouldn’t be “quick to be a teacher” – out of deep respect for the work and regard for the sheep. But men should **not** have to be compelled to this work. God deserves and the sheep require **willing** service.

God desires and deserves happy, willing, shepherds. Complaining pastors are committing a great sin. It is offensive to God. And we will be tempted!

Jared Wilson: “The struggle to shepherd willingly happens every time ministry becomes difficult.”

When criticism mounts, when your hard work doesn’t seem to be producing any results, when you are worn out by the work – it is easy to fall into a grumbling, lethargic spirit. But we can’t let our hearts go there.

Jared Wilson: The minute I begin seeing God’s people as problems to be solved (or avoided) is the minute I’ve denied the heart of Christ.

Ask yourself; are you a happy pastor? Ask your spouse. Ask your friends. And when your zeal is lagging – remind yourself of what God has asked you to do. He’s asked you to feed and lead those for whom Christ died. And to do so gladly for His sake.

B. Not For Shameful Gain – But Eagerly.

Unfortunately, the history of the church is rife with stories of men who sought ministry for selfish purposes. One of the banes of the early churches’ existence was the popularity of traveling preachers who told people what their itching ears wanted to hear, in order to gather followers and pad their pocketbooks. The health and wealth heresy that is so popular today is the same.

“Shameful gain” can take many forms. You may have no intention of being in the ministry for the money – but there are many in it for the reputation, in it for the recognition, for the prestige of being viewed as a godly man, a true leader, a great preacher, etc.

This temptation lurks in all of us. Our pride wants to “get” something from the ministry. Something for self. Something we think we deserve. The evidence of that pride will be seen in the disappointment you feel when you do not receive what you think you are owed,

- when you don’t get the compliments you think your brilliant message deserved,
- when you don’t receive the thanks that your sacrifice merited,
- when you aren’t credited for the hours you put in, the sleepless nights you spend.

Jared Wilson, “Shameful gain is derived from what the pastor thinks he is owed. What he believes he’s earned.”

In contrast to serving for shameful gain, God calls his shepherds to serve ‘eagerly’. The word can also be rendered “freely”. Free from what? Free from the bondage of your selfish expectations and entitlement. Free to serve the flock because you actually love them. Free to give of yourself sacrificially, with no thought of return, because you love Jesus and these are His precious sheep.

C. Not domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock.

Of all the commands Peter gives here, this may well be the most challenging. The Greek word is based on the word for “Lord” and means to *‘rule over’*. And someone could easily say – well isn’t that what an elder is supposed to do? Shouldn’t they rule?

Well yes, they clearly should! But ***gospel*** ruling is ***servant*** ruling. Being an elder doesn’t make you the boss – it makes you the chief servant. Jesus makes this clear in **Matthew 20:25–28** where he gathers his disciples together and gives them an essential lesson in gospel leadership.

Matthew 20:25 “Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Jesus set the pattern for leading sheep. We are not called to rule over them, exercising our power and control. We are called to lead them by the example of humble service – even to death. Notice Jesus words “for the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” We do not lead by domineering but by dying.

“Being examples to the flock.”

If you’ve ever watched a shepherd leading his flock of sheep, you will know that shepherds lead not by shouting out orders but by leading the way. Shepherds lead by going first and providing an example.

Wilson: “We don’t lead by orders, we lead by example.”

This is challenging, especially for preachers, and particularly if you are gifted. It is extremely tempting to hide behind your position, your theology, your particular gifts. After all, if the sheep are impressed with our theological knowledge – maybe they won’t notice our fear of men. If they love our preaching – maybe they will be willing to overlook our impatience, our glib self-confidence, our prayerlessness. And, often they will. But we are still failing the calling.

The calling isn't primarily a calling to exercise our gifts – it's a calling to follow Christ so that we can invite others to follow us.

Philippians 3:17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

Be an Example. Of what?? We read a text like this and tend to assume that we are supposed to be an example of spiritual "success". And so we get to work.

- An example of diligence – we strive hard to be seen as busy
- An example of piety – we strive hard to look spiritual.

But this isn't a command to "appear" to be anything. It's a command to **be** something. And there is no faking what we are – flawed people who desperately need a Savior. The reality is that becoming an elder, a pastor, won't fix us, it will expose us. Our pride, lust, greed, laziness, thirst for power – whatever our idols are – they will get exposed under the pressure of pastoring.

So how can Peter call us to be examples when we are so evidently flawed?

You can pretend to be something you aren't – and hope to get away with it. Many do.

Or you can confess the truth, under the banner of the gospel and become an example of living in grace and the power of the gospel.

The example we are to set is the example of people who know their weakness, gladly acknowledge they need a Savior and, by repentance and faith, are growing in the grace and knowledge of God. Paul can say "imitate me" and at the same time say "I am the chief of sinners". He can say "imitate me" and at the same time confess his fears, his anxieties, his weakness. His testimony is not to his ability or success but his faith "in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

Shepherds are not moral success stories – men who've made it. They are men who know their weakness and who lean on grace and have their hearts set on eternal things. There's freedom and power in the gospel for pastors and elder. We don't have to pretend to be more than we are. We can say with Paul, "By the grace of God, I am what I am."

John Newton

"I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be,
I am not what I hope to be in another world; but still
I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am"

Lecture 6

The Elder's Motivation

1 Peter 5:4

Intro: It's hard to be pastor. One of the hardest things is dealing with the congregations' expectations. Someone, humorously wrote up the following job description for the "The Perfect" Pastor".

The perfect pastor preaches exactly 20 minutes.

He condemns sin roundly but never hurts anyone's feelings.

He works from 8 AM until midnight and is also the church janitor.

The perfect pastor makes \$40 a week, wears good clothes, drives a good car, and donates \$30 a week to the church.

He is 29 years old and has 40 years experience.

The perfect pastor has a burning desire to work with teenagers, and spends most of his time with the senior citizens.

He makes 15 home visits a day and is always in his office to be available when needed.

We chuckle, but the fact is that the unrealistic expectations of the congregation are one of the most stressful aspects of the Pastor's job.

And the work is never done.

“No matter how much work you do, you never finish the work. You never do everything you could have done. You never satisfy everyone. In 32 years of full-time Christian ministry, I have never once completed everything on my to-do list.”

Yesterday we saw how critically important this task is. Christ has called us to shepherd his sheep. It is the most significant calling in the world. This morning we spoke of the unique sorrows of the ministry and looked at Peter’s admonitions concerning the character of gospel ministry. And now, we are returning to 1 Peter 5, looking at the Motive for Gospel Ministry.

What motivates Gods’ shepherds is the promise of a great reward, given to us, by our own Shepherd, Jesus Christ himself.

1 Peter 5:4 “And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

I. The Category of “Reward”

I’d like to begin by spending a little time considering this category of “reward” because I don’t believe that we, as Reformed” Christians, are well-versed in it.

The Greek word that Peter uses here for “receive”, is fascinating in light of the wide variety of options that were available to him. There are numerous words Peter could have used, each with their own nuance. For instance, he could have used

δέχομαι^a; λαμβάνω^c: to receive or accept an object or benefit for which the initiative rests with the giver.

κληρονομέω^a: (klayronomeoh) to receive something which has not been earned, or, to receive a gift that has been promised. (Heb 6:12, “be imitators of those who through faith and patience received what had been promised.”) This would have been a very good choice.

But he uses Κομίζω – (komizoh) “to receive back, to be compensated.” It has the sense of receiving what belongs to you, what is owed to you. Jesus uses this word in the parable of the talents. The master who went away, leaving portions of his property to his servants, rebukes the servant who hid his talent in the ground.

Matthew 25:27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.

I find it fascinating that Peter feels free to use this specific word in speaking of the reward to be given to elders. He speaks of a reward as compensation for their labor!

Certainly, Peter doesn't mean that God owes us something. He isn't saying that our labor in some way obligates God to reward us. The glory of God is that he is no man's debtor. As God says in Job 41:11

“Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.”

And yet, Peter uses this word intentionally and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Peter is not afraid to speak of elders being compensated by God for their labors – receiving from God what is owed. That's quite amazing.

I was brought up to believe that “all our works are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). But I've since learned that, though it is true that our works are not inherently meritorious and could never suffice to appease God's wrath, God does not see them as “filthy rags” at all. He sees our work as precious evidence fruit of His gracious work in our lives.

Not only is it true that God is pleased with the faith and obedience of his children, as imperfect as it is, it is evident from all these verses that the Father wants us to KNOW that he is pleased! He wants us to see Him as our loving, heavenly Father who is not afraid to express his delight in the works of his children!

I remember, when my daughter was 7 years old, she made a birthday card for me and eagerly gave it to me. I remember opening it, and there was a misspelled word. What kind of father would I be if I had rebuked her for the error and ripped up the card? Who does that?? And yet, how often don't we secretly assume that our father in heaven is just that way – disappointed in our failures. Frustrated with our weakness. It isn't true.

DeYoung, “There is no righteousness that makes us right with God except for the righteousness of Christ. But for those who have been made right with God by grace alone through faith alone ... our righteous deeds...are exceedingly sweet, precious, and pleasing to him.”

Weary pastors need to hear this. Do you have a functioning theology of your Father's pleasure in your work? There is something incredibly powerful, particularly for men, to hear from their father, “Well done, my son.”

And so, in chapter 5, Peter clearly intends this reward to serve as a mighty motivation for the shepherds of Gods' sheep.

II. The Nature of the Reward – an Unfading Crown of Glory

We are not that familiar with the significance and glory of crowns. But in the Roman/Greco world of Peter's day, the audience would immediately have a picture in their mind.

“The word for “crown” here is the same word used for the wreath given to those who had won an athletic contest, the crown given to a soldier for valor in combat, or the crown worn by a king. In any case, it rewarded an extraordinary achievement.”⁵

You will find references to such a crown throughout the New Testament. We already quoted Paul in 2 Timothy 4.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Revelation 2:10 Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

I’m quite certain the crown of life isn’t a literal headdress. But it signifies the glory that will be given to us. It is a “crown of glory”. I find that breathtaking. How could people like you and I be given glory??

It is “unfading”. Everything in this world fades. Beauty, wealth, health, reputation – it all fades away.

Tim Keller, “At some point in your near future, a few people will gather around your grave. They will shed a few tears. Say a few words. And then go back to the church for ham buns.”

Our bodies will fade – but not our crown! Pastors are promised a glory that never fades. It lasts for all eternity.

What a great thing to remember when the work is hard and you feel ready to quit. We can be empowered by the conviction of coming glory, as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:17

¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

When will we receive this reward??

“When the Chief Shepherd appears...”

III. The Giver of the Reward

The secret motive for happy, humble, eager ministry is all found here – in your knowledge of and love for the Chief Shepherd.

A. There is a Chief Shepherd

It is critical for the shepherds of God’s flock to carry out their ministry continually in the awareness that we are under-shepherds; that we serve only by the authority of Christ, only for the cause of

⁵ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/crown-glory/>

Christ, only by the grace of Christ, and only for the glory of Christ. We are nothing, he is everything. Our calling is to point people to HIM – the true Shepherd and Overseer.

So much of the anxiety and burden of being a shepherd is caused by our own forgetfulness. We begin to look at the church as our church, these sheep as our sheep. We feel the weight of trying to hold things together, trying to build the church. One of the greatest occupational hazards of ministry is self-reliance. It can so easily feel like it's up to you. After all, you're the one showing up every day, the only full-time paid staff. You're the one doing the vast majority of the work. The congregation seems to expect you to make the church grow.

The best gift you can give to yourself and your sheep is the constant reminder that you are not the Chief Shepherd – Jesus is.

Jesus doesn't ask us to build his church. He's building it.

Jesus didn't ask us to hold the church together – he's holding it together.

The reality of a Chief Shepherd means that there's a Shepherd for pastors. That is really good news for flawed men like us.

Jared Wilson: "If you had to sum up my roughly 20 years in church leadership positions, I would say it is a sterling record of awkwardness, foolishness, and outright idiocy, punctuated by brief moments of accidental competence and covered totally by the grace of God in the love of Christ....Herein is the justification for the pastor: because of Christ's perfect work on your behalf, your failure, your daily anxiety, your unwillingness, your stress, your sin, your brokenness, your ineptitude, your ignorance, your awfulness, your regrets, your pride, and your arrogance are no match for the deep and abiding grace of God given to you before time began and now and forevermore.

Peter knew all about failure: when he denied Jesus 3 times; when he had to be rebuked by Paul for failing to live in accordance with the gospel in Galatia. Peter was a flawed pastor. But he had been rescued by the Great Shepherd of the Sheep. Jesus had laid down his life for him. Jesus went to the cross and died there, bearing the wrath of God for Peter's sin, and rising from the dead for Peter's justification. What a Savior! And then he ordained Peter to ministry. John tells us the story in John 21.

As you know, Jesus asked Peter three questions, once for each time Peter denied him. But the first question is the hardest one. They all sound the same, but the first is unique. "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Do you see what Jesus is doing? He's saying,

"Simon, son of John, in light of your three-fold denial, do you still insist that you are the greatest disciple, more devoted than any of the other men? Do you still want to insist that you love me more than these men? Are you still confident in yourself?"

The old Simon would have seized this opportunity to exalt himself. But the old Simon died when Jesus was crucified and a new Simon was born when God raised Jesus from the dead. And the new Simon has been broken by the exposing love and healed by the forgiving grace of Jesus, the Chief Shepherd. The new Simon finally understood why Jesus had come – to die for sinners, even great, desperately wicked, unworthy, sinners like Peter. And all he could do is say, Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you.

If we are going to be of any real use in the church of Jesus Christ, it is essential that we grasp this gospel – not as a theology or theory, but as the necessary reality of our own life. Our people don't need to see a spiritual success story. They need to see a mighty Savior and a man up front who leans daily, heavily, necessarily and gladly upon Him.

2. In our denomination, when a man is ordained and installed as a pastor, he is asked to respond to 8 questions. All very good and appropriate. But Jesus only asks one – three separate times: “Do you love me?” That doesn't mean that theological training doesn't matter. Jesus has spent three years training Peter and the others in the doctrines of the kingdom of God. It just means that theological training is not sufficient for the task of shepherding the flock of God. The critical issue, both for salvation and for fruitful service is – “Do you love Jesus”?

Do you actually, in truth love me? And we must be able to say “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Then hear your Savior say, “Feed my sheep.”

Isn't it amazing that Jesus would know you and still love you? Know you and still call you to this high honor? Isn't your ordination to gospel ministry one of the greatest evidences of grace and love you know?

This is the essential thing because this is what will give you power and perseverance and joy in the ministry of shepherding. Someone once said, “The service of an elder springs from God's grace and runs to his glory”.

If you love the Shepherd of the Sheep, you will happily devote yourself to loving the sheep. The same grace and love that called you will one day reward you.

If God calls you to shepherd his sheep – do not lose sight of His promised reward! Don't lose sight of the coming day, when the Chief Shepherd will appear. You and I will give an account to Him for our shepherding of the sheep. But we do not need to fear that day if we are laboring in the gospel, resting in the gospel, leading his sheep to drink the living water and eat the living bread of the gospel. We can look forward to that day – not to boast of our work but to glory in His.

Can you imagine what it will be like on that day to see the bride of Christ, all those people you ministered to with such frailty – now made perfect – and to know that you had a small but essential part to play?

Let your heart burn for that day.

Hebrews 13:20–21 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Paul Allen, “This is a glorious promise to faithful pastors in hard situations. It is meant to motivate you in the ministry. It is meant to produce perseverance. It is meant to produce eagerness. It is meant to produce willingness. It is meant to produce on the ground, in the trenches, exemplary life. Life is short. The crown is magnificent.”⁶

⁶ <http://pastorpaulallen.blogspot.com/2016/02/what-is-unfading-crown-of-glory.html>