***Loving Shepherds, Loving the Flock***

The Lord wants to bless His church by giving us leaders who can guide us in our spiritual lives. We ought to thank the Lord that He has called some men to be our spiritual leaders and it is right that we affirm them in this role, receive their loving leadership and commit ourselves to faithfully pray for them.

It’s important then that we understand what God’s Word has to say about spiritual leadership in the church. I’ve called this session *“****Loving Shepherds, Loving the Flock,”*** because this is what God has called leaders in His church to be and to do.

Let’s look at how this should work out in the lives of those whom God calls to be spiritual leaders at Valley Heights Community Church.

**A.** **The Supreme Example: The Lord Jesus Christ**

1. Ultimately, all leadership in the church is to be patterned after the supreme example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was Christ the King who was willing to come to this earth in love and great humility,***not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many****.”* (Mt. 20:28)

Interact with this verse, particularly in its context (vss. 17-28)

I believe this servant-attitude is at the heart of what the Lord desires from those He calls to provide leadership in His Church. He wants us to follow His example of what it means to serve others. He wants us to be willing and eager to serve and to lay down our lives for His dear people.

What would laying down your life for the flock at Valley Heights look like in practical ways?

2. The Imagery of a Shepherd

When we think about spiritual leadership in the church, a particular image or picture ought to come quickly to our minds. It’s the image of shepherds leading, caring for and meeting the needs of a flock.

The Bible often speaks of those who serve as leaders in the church as shepherds, and the congregation as sheep in a flock. It is a very appropriate illustration because it highlights the loving and caring relationship which should exist between the spiritual leaders and the rest of the members in Christ’s church.

What picture comes to your mind when you hear the word shepherd?

**Examine John 10:1-18**. What are some principles about spiritual leadership you can learn from our Lord’s use of the shepherd imagery? List them below.

**B.** **Spiritual Leaders are Under-shepherds of the Chief Shepherd**

1. Jesus Christ is the Head of His Church

Ephesians 1:22-23

*And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

2. Jesus Christ Has Given Certain Gifts to His Church

Ephesians 4:11-12

*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ …*

**C. The Responsibility to Shepherd Christ’s Flock**

Because Christ loves His church, He has chosen to give to her spiritual leaders who can care for her needs and assist her in learning the truths of the faith found in the Word of God. These spiritual leaders are not more important than any of God’s other children.

There is no hierarchy among the people of God in Christ’s church. **Jesus Christ is the head of His church – period!** And all of Christ’s disciples, including those who serve in leadership, are together on level ground before Him. However, within this equality in the body, Christ has ordained that some men would be charged with the duty of serving as shepherds of God’s flock, the church. And so, it is important that we understand what spiritual leadership is all about and how to recognize those men who God wants to minister as servant leaders here at VH’s. Peter helps us see this in 1 Peter 5:1-4.

1. **The Motivation of Shepherds**

1 Peter 5:1-2a “*Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you***.**”

Notice how Peter describes himself. Comment on the following three descriptions …

*your fellow elder … (an apostle / 3.5 yrs with Jesus/ )* This is the heart of a true leader – he doesn’t put himself on a pedestal as though he was better than anyone else, but is content to serve alongside others in Christ’s church and to exalt the Lord and His Word above all else.

*witness of the sufferings of Christ …* Peter saw the many ways in which our Lord suffered during His time on this earth ... he witnessed the many abuses He received / the hostility directed toward Jesus / the mistreatment during His life and then the horrible abuse during the time of His trials and crucifixion … the Lord isn’t asking us to do anything that He had not already done for us. Leadership for Jesus meant suffering and laying down His life for us in death. … The fact that Jesus Himself suffered should be a reminder to those whom He will call to lead in His church – to serve as His representative, to shepherd His flock, knowing that they too can expect to suffer!

To be a leader in Christ’s church is not a call to glamour and glory – it’s a call to servanthood and sacrifice. Sometimes it means being tired/ sometimes inconvenienced/ sometimes misunderstood/ sometimes mistreated ... / character may be maligned / you may have your motives questioned/ or be falsely accused/ or called unloving b/c you call people to live obedient lives when they want to live as they please/ But then you realize it was like this for the Lord and it will be for those who want to model His way for others.

We need to remember what 1 Peter 2:21-23 says ...

When we suffer for Jesus Christ’s sake; for the sake of righteousness (for defending what is right and honourable to God) we need to entrust ourselves to the Lord. In fact, we need to rejoice knowing that a day is coming soon when the Lord Jesus Christ will return and on that day there will be glory for all who have suffered for Him.

*a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed …* We need to remember that on the day that Jesus Christ is revealed in glory, we too will be revealed as belonging to Him and we will share in His glory. What a promise that is! …

How do these things relate to motivation of shepherds?

What is the significance of the little phrase: “**the flock of God**”? (Consider Acts 20:28)

Ephesians 5:25 says, “*Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her*.” Christ loves His church with a selfless, sacrificial, and unreserved love. He expressed that love by giving her everything He had, including His own life, for her sake. The picture of the church is that of a bride which Christ will present to Himself in all her glory when He returns for her. She will be holy and blameless – a perfect reflection of His glory.

Every elder/ every shepherd needs to remember this, then, that the church is Jesus Christ’s blood- bought bride. He loved Her enough to die for her, and so every elder must love each one who is part of Christ’s flock and give of himself in service to the whole flock and to Christ. (We have been entrusted with people for whom Jesus Christ died! What a calling! What a responsibility! Jesus gave His life for the church / we need to give our lives as well.)

2. **The Responsibility of Shepherds**

1 Peter 5:2 *“shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight.”*

The primary responsibility of leaders in the church is to ***shepherd the flock of God ... exercising oversight!*** These are the main things elders are to do. Elders are to be shepherds of God’s people who are the flock! The primary responsibilities of shepherding are the following: to pray for the church, to lead the church, to study the Word of God and teach the Word of God, to protect the church from false teachers, to exhort and admonish the saints in sound doctrine, to visit the sick, and to judge doctrinal issues (these are the primary tasks of the shepherds).

In Biblical language, the elders are to lead, feed, care for and protect the local church. Some will earn their living doing so – especially those who are called to the ministry of teaching and preaching the Word (1 Tim. 5:17-18) – and others will serve as lay elders, but all have an equal standing of leadership and all have the responsibility to shepherd the flock of God.

a. They **lead the flock** by “*exercising oversight*” (Seeing the big picture) It is watching over the people who God brings here to be part of this fellowship.

Hebrews 13:17 “*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you*.”

Elders have the responsibility to guide the people in the way they should go. To do this we need to know the Word of God well enough to know God’s instructions for how His people are to live in this world.

Elders are called to help individuals or families with making decisions in their lives. Here at Valley Heights our elders are continually involved in counselling people from the Word of God to help them bring their lives into conformity with the Word. God has given us His Word so that we don’t have to guess about what is right or wrong; what honours Him or doesn’t; how to live in this world and how to respond to those around us. This a major responsibility of shepherds – to help the sheep walk in the ways of the Lord. Psalm 23

b. They **feed the flock** by teaching the Word of God

2 Timothy 4:2 … *“preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.”*

This is the primary task of the elders. We are to feed the souls of people with spiritual nourishment (knowing as our Lord said, “man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” - Matt. 4:4). This is how we demonstrate our love for you ... by feeding you God’s Word. Sheep know they are loved by their shepherds by the kind of food they feed them.

... we are to teach you what God says; teach you the wisdom of God, not man’s so-called wisdom. (And this must happen at every level in the church and we are responsible to oversee this ... from the nursery on up / all the SS classes and youth and midweek, men’s and woman’s ministries and all counselling ... our call from Jesus Christ is to teach the Word!) the unadulterated Word of God is what we must teach

c. They **care for** the flock ... through spiritual encouragement

1 Thessalonians 5:14 … *“admonish the unruly; encourage the fainthearted, help the weak; be patient with everyone”*

(shepherding is a demanding task ... 24/7 ... and it is to be done out of love) there are so many needs to be met

... James 1:27says to "visit orphans and widows in their distress". ... In James 5:14 we are to "pray for the sick.”

... Matt. 18:12-14 talks about pursuing straying members, going after sheep who go astray

Caring for all the needs of a church this size is not easy. We need prayers and encouragement. We need others involvement as well.

d. They **protect the flock** …

1. by exhorting people in sound doctrine … so that the flock isn't "tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14).

2. by refuting those who contradict the teaching of God’s Word … (Titus 1:9). (In Acts 20 Paul warns elders to be on guard against savage wolves! ... )

3. by confronting & disciplining those who are stubbornly unrepentant … (Matt. 18:17)

3. **The Attitude of Shepherds.**

Peter writes ...“**I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,** 2**shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight** {the question is how? With what kind of attitude should elders serve} the remainder of this passage tells us

*Voluntarily, according to the will of God* *…* serving God! / he is motivated by God's love for himself and God’s love for His people.

*Not for sordid gain**…* financial gain must never be the motivation for a shepherd.

*But with eagerness**…* eagerness to serve others, eagerness to sacrifice, knowing that this is the flock of God. It’s about giving, not getting. Serving and loving and sacrificing as the Lord Jesus did.

*Not yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge …* not heavy-handed, not demanding / my way or the highway … The true shepherd must never have this kind of attitude. He doesn’t own the sheep. He didn’t purchase the sheep with his own blood. Self-will is a disqualifying characteristic!!!

*But proving to be examples to the flock**…* should be men that God’s people can look at to be examples of those who want their lives to please God. They are not perfect people – not at all. Rather, we are all sinners saved by grace, and yet, we are to love the Lord enough to strive to obey Him and trust Him with our whole lives.

4. **The Reward of Shepherds**

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

Peter reminds us that there is only one Chief Shepherd of His people – He is Jesus Christ. All other shepherds are under-shepherds who have been entrusted with a responsibility to shepherd Christ’s flock. Those who are faithful, Peter says, **will receive the unfading crown of glory** when our Lord returns.

To know that you loved Christ’s flock, that you fed them the Word of God, cared for them, lead them in this life and sought to protect them from harm should be all the reward anyone could ask for. But our Lord wants us to share in His glory as well. The attitude of every elder/shepherd should be to hear Jesus Christ his Lord say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” That is glory indeed!