

The Shepherd's Protection

Selected Scriptures

September 8, 2024

We are in a final message on the short series on shepherding and it's just a, just given the briefest outline on the chief duties of pastoral ministry. And as I've said to you before, I'm kind of teaching my own job description to you to show you from God's Word what pastors are responsible to do. This is job description for pastors, elders, shepherds, overseers, bishops, if you want to use that word, that's the word for overseer, Bishop.

But so far in this series, we've talked about the shepherd's instruction and the shepherd's exhortation. That's the previous weeks, today the topic is the shepherd's protection. The shepherd's protection. This is how the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Good Shepherd, John 10:11 and verse 14 as well, he is also the chief shepherd of the sheep, 1 Peter 5:4.

This is how Jesus Christ uses, us under shepherds, his elders, his pastors. He uses them to protect his church. And why would his church need protection? Well, a lot of ways to answer that question, but just in view of our topic, when shepherds do their job, when they provide sound instruction from God's Word, when they exhort people to forsake their sins and walk in righteousness, well, that draws fire from the enemy.

God uses the faithful shepherding in the instruction and exhortation to unify a church, to grow the body strong, to make it effective and fruitful and Satan don't like that. The enemy does not like an effective church and so he opposes it and he has, he's very wiley; finds many different ways to attack.

We understand though the attack come, though it comes through people, though it comes through trouble from people, whether it's the culture around us, or people who rise up within us, or whatever the issue is, false doctrine, people who, who, teach that, and past that, or bad lifestyles; whatever it is, we understand because the Bible tells us this, that our struggle is

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not ultimately against flesh and blood. The persecution, and struggle, and suffering, and, and, pressure comes with a face. We have to look beyond the face. It's not the face that's the issue.

There is a spiritual battle going on behind the scenes, and it's a very real battle. It's against demonic spiritual forces that are too much for us. I mean, we being flesh and blood, we are no match for the angelic realm and the demonic realm. But our God is with us. That's why we, he tells us, "take up the full armor of God. It's so we can resist in the evil day." It's so that we can stand firm.

We know how to fight this battle. We know how to fight the battle because of the instruction that's given to us through the local church, because of the exhortation we received through the Shepherd's ministry. We know to put on the full armor of God. We know what it is, we know how to do it. We know how to fight the battle. So what brings the battle is the very thing that strengthens us to fight the battle. I love how God uses the one to do the other all the time.

Before we get into our outline, as I've kind of done through this series, I just want to start by laying out my thesis statement. Also for this, I've done it with the instruction of the shepherds, with the exhortation of the shepherds. Now I'm going to do it with the protection of the shepherds. Here's the thesis statement we'll follow: Shepherds protect the flock of God from the harmful influence of stumbling blocks. Stumbling blocks, that is, those who cause people to sin in doctrine or in practice.

Shepherds protect the flock of God from, har, the harmful influence of stumbling blocks, that is, those who cause people to sin in doctrine or in practice. That's our thesis statement. We're going to work through an outline, as we've done, and as we work through this outline on the shepherd's duty to protect the flock, I want to start first with the consequences of not protecting the flock. Here's what's at stake.

Here's the consequences of an unprotected flock. And after that, we're going to focus in our second point, focus the lens

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on those who are in need of protection. And then thirdly, finally, we'll see how it is that shepherds protect the flock, what tools they use, what structures are in place in order to protect the flock of God.

So point one, let's talk about what happens, number one, when pastors don't protect. Just write that down in your outline if you want to number one, when pastors don't protect. And turn in your Bibles for this point, to Ezekiel chapter 34.

Ezekiel chapter 34, this is where God indicts Israel's shepherds. He names their sin, pronounces judgment on them, and points to the restoration of the good shepherding to come to his flock in Jesus Christ. Ezekiel 34, the indictment on Israel's shepherds, their failure, which points to the restoration of true shepherding, good shepherding in the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

We'll start with Ezekiel 34:1 to 6. "Then the word of Yahweh came to me, saying, Son of Man, prophecy against the shepherds of Israel, prophecy and say to those shepherds, Thus says, Lord

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Yahweh, woe, shepherds of Israel who've been shepherding themselves. Should not the shepherd shepherd the flock? But you eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool. You sacrifice the fat sheep without shepherding the flock.

"Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, and the diseased you've not healed, and the broken you've not bound up. The scattered you have not brought back, nor have you searched for the lost. But with strength and with severity you've dominated them. They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and then became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill. My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to seek or search for them."

Lest we misconstrue the imagery here, misconstrue the text, you need to understand this is a kind of an extended metaphor, using shepherds and sheep, to kind of refer to Israel's leaders and then those who follow the leaders. This is condemning Israel's leadership, because it's devolved into false shepherds. Shepherds that brutalize the sheep don't care for the sheep at

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all. That's not a shepherd. So they're false. They're shepherds in name only.

But in condemning the shepherds in this text, we want to understand the members of the flock are not all innocent. Okay, so we're not looking at bad evil shepherds and innocent victims, sheep. There is a victim thing set up here, but notice, "my flock was scattered" in verse, in verse 6, "my flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill." That is an allusion to the idolatry that was taking place among the sheep of Israel, worshiping and sacrificing under every tree and on every hill, every high hill.

You know, do you see in the list of the kings, in kings and Chronicles, this, this king was kings of Judah. This king was, was righteous, followed the ways of David, but he had this against him, he didn't do away with the high places. The high places where the people would go and sacrifice and do their own thing and conduct their own worship. So we want to understand that the, the, members of the flock, it's a mixed flock and it

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becomes a more mixed flock, the more faithless and unfaithful the shepherds are.

Remember, in Israel, both people and priests, leaders, followers were guilty of vile idolatry. It's portrayed here. We'll see it even further in Ezekiel 34. The sheep are not all, the sheep are not all just innocent victims. The sheep are sinners too. That's why they need shepherds over them. But they need true shepherds, not false shepherds.

They need true shepherds to lovingly corral them and correct them and guide and direct them into green pastures and buy still waters. These leaders have not done that. They're too busy trying to profit from their position, using the goods of the flock to advantage themselves. They fleece the flock, the, whether that means overtly taking money and, and, improving their own financial position, or it could even mean just gaining respect and esteem; being, being, treated with deference by people as they walk through the city, holding positions and prominence, places of respect in the community.

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Many people don't care about the money. In fact, they use the money to get those very things to be respected and flattered by men. So while the shepherds are tending to themselves, these sheep are sickly, diseased, broken. All those are images to portray people who are in bondage to sin, dominated by sin, sick with sin, diseased with sin. It's, it's, the sin is affecting all the systems of their body. They're having a systemic shutdown in their body leading to eventual spiritual death.

So as a result, the sheep, because they're sick, they're sin addled, they're scattered, divided, separated, they're not together and as a unit, they're not together in a safe flock. They're wandering apart, isolated from each other in ones and twos and threes, going here, going there and distanced from the flock; they're lost, unsafe, and prey for wolves.

Look at verses 7 to 8, "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of Yahweh: 'As I live,' declares the Lord Yahweh, 'surely, because My flock has become a plunder, My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd, and

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My shepherds did not seek for My flock, but rather the shepherds shepherded themselves and did not shepherd My flock.'"

Spiritually speaking, sheep left to themselves without a diligent shepherd instructing them, reproving, rebuking, exhorting them, correcting them, they are plunder. They're food for the hireling of the flock, the one pretending to be a pastor. They are prey for all absolute wolves. They're beasts of the field. They're victims of disease. They, they bring upon themselves self-inflicted wounds that bring injury to their hearts, their souls. They have lifelong consequences from that.

Again, all this metaphor for spiritual danger, the consequences of people left to themselves, uncorrected but merely affirmed, placated, flattered, but not truly confronted or cared for. Left to themselves, they can't escape the snare of sin. They can't get rid of the alluring tastes of an unhealthy diet. They can't turn away from the enticement of deceptive voices calling to them, wooing them, bringing, bringing, them into dangerous places. They can't turn away from the looking at the bad example and bad advice of unqualified men and unqualified shepherds.

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All of us are sheep like this. Your under shepherds, your pastors and elders, we too need to discern and listen to good voices, good shepherds before us. We do. We, we don't, we don't freewheel it, think we're independent voices. We trust good and godly faithful shepherds and pastors, who've come before us. We stand on their shoulders. We learn from their, their writings. We learn from their testimony and their example.

We're sheep ourselves, every single one of us. We need to understand our sheep in danger of being led astray. It's for good reason that our God characterizes us as sheep. We need help. We're prone to wander like lost sheep. The Psalmist who wrote Psalm 119:176; 176 verses on the word of God, on the love of God, of the Word, 176 verses.

In the final verse, he confesses this, in humility and in truth, he says after writing so much excellent poetry on the Word of God and the God of the Word, and extolling him and his power and his care and his love, and how much he wants to follow after him, he says this in the very last verse, "I have gone astray

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like a lost sheep; seek your servant." Are we any better than that Psalmist? Are any of us pastors, elders, leaders, any better than the psalmist? We are not.

We can survey both testaments of Scripture and see how Jeremiah in the Old Testament pronounces woes on unfaithful shepherds and false prophets of Israel. Jesus in his time has pronounced woes on the scribes and the Pharisees. We've studied through that in Luke's Gospel. But we can survey both testaments of Scripture and see that God reserves a special judgment for any man who would take up the mantle of leadership, but is not qualified to be there. How dare he do that?

Why is God reserving serious special judgment for false shepherds, those who are unqualified, ungifted, not called? Because unqualified leadership has the appearance of faithfulness, has the appearance in the title of leadership. He offers his very presence, offers refuge and protection, promises spiritual provision. But sheep who flee to that voice, and that man, and that title, they find that man to be a crumbling wall, not fortified, not strong, not protective.

They find him to be a fruitless tree, having nothing. But like the fig tree that Jesus cursed, representing Israel's leadership, nothing but leaves, no fruit, no sustenance. It finds them to be coming to those kind of false titular shepherds; shepherds in name only, find them to be waterless springs bringing parched lives and souls, no life-giving water.

For sheep who follow false shepherds, it leaves a lasting mark and so God says starting in verse 9, "Therefore you shepherds hear the word of Yahweh: 'Thus says the Lord Yahweh, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will seek My flock from their hand and make them cease from shepherding the flock. And so the shepherds will not shepherd themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth.'" The picture there is wolves eating the flock.

"'I'll deliver My flock from their mouth so that they will not be food for them.' For thus says the Lord Yahweh, 'Behold, I Myself will seek My sheep and care for them. As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his sheep which are

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spread out, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a' " cloud, "cloudy and gloomy day.' "

Skip down to verse 14. He says, "I'll shepherd them," in a, "in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and be shepherded in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will shepherd My flock. I will make them lie down," declares the Lord Yahweh. "I'll search for the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken, strengthen the sick; but the fat and strong I will destroy. I will shepherd them with judgment."

There are obviously eschatological tones, prophecies, promises set in that section, but skip down to verse 23, because I want to draw your attention to where God identifies his appointed shepherd who will care for his sheep. Verse 23, "Then I will establish over them one shepherd," just one, "My servant David, and he will shepherd them; he will shepherd them himself and will be their shepherd. And I, Yahweh will be their God, and My

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servant David will be Prince among them; I, Yahweh have spoken.”
What a comfort. And we've seen that come to pass on the pages of
Scripture.

For us, that prediction, that promise is past tense. We look
back and see the Lord Jesus Christ, who's the Good Shepherd, the
great Shepherd, and we say fulfilled. Jeremiah 23, also another
woe against Israel's shepherds. We see that Christ there is
pictured as sending out under shepherds to do his bidding.

So there's one shepherd, the Son of David, Jesus the Christ, but
he employs under shepherds underneath his rule. He puts them
into service to tend his sheep. He says in Jeremiah 23, “I will
also raise up shepherds over them, and they will shepherd them,
and they will not be afraid any longer,” nor, “nor be terrified,
nor will any be left unattended.”

So the fulfillment of God's promises to give his people true
shepherds, that starts with Jesus. He calls, sends his apostles
out to do the shepherding work and that continues to this day,
as he calls and sends shepherds into local churches; the

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pastors, the elders to tend his lambs, shepherd his sheep, instructing them, exhorting them, so that they protect the flock of God. That's how this works.

Now the failure of, of these false shepherds to do their duty, to fulfill their responsibility to protect the flock, this leaves the flock vulnerable to beasts of the field, so ravenous wolves who will eat them, but also any other predator that seeks an easy meal. But there is another danger that God identifies here in Ezekiel 34, which is another consequence of not protecting the flock.

Go back to verse 17, Yahweh says this again. This is in his monologue here, "As for you, My flock, thus says Lord Yahweh, "Behold I will judge between one sheep and another." Think about the Matthew 25 sheep and goats separation. Okay, all those goats appear to be in the same flock, and then Yahweh comes, in, in Christ to execute judgment, and he separates the sheep from the goats, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. This is that.

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“Behold, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the Rams and the male goats. Is it too slight a thing for you that you should be shepherded in good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pastures? Or that you should drink of the clear waters, that you must foul the rest with your feet?

“As for My flock, they must be shepherded on what you tread down with your feet and drink what you foul with your feet!”

Therefore, thus says Lord Yahweh to them, “Behold, I, even I will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you push with side and with shoulder, and,” thrust all, “thrust at all the sickly with your horns until you've scattered them abroad, therefore, I will save My flock, and they will no longer be plunder; and I will judge between one sheep and another.”

An unprotected flock, because of shepherding failure becomes an abusive flock dominated by the rich, powerful, selfish, those indifferent to the weak and the needy. Abuses arise as male goats butt the ewes and the little lambs. The fat sheep shove the lean sheep aside and push them aside with their powerful

shoulders and hit them with their horns, in order to take more and more for themselves.

This is a picture again of people wealthy, powerful, proud, self-centered. When they enter into the flock, they expect preferential treatment. They get preferential treatment out in the world because of their wealth and their power. They expect it here. They consume time and attention. They make demands while giving nothing. With critical spirits, they're ever ready to complain. They're never humbling themselves, confessing their sins, repenting. They devour and suck resources dry. They always demand more.

This metaphor is so apropos for the congregation of Israel in the days of Moses, in the days of the prophets. We see that it's so apropos for the people of Galilee and Judea in the days of Jesus and his Apostles. This has happened again, and again, and again throughout history. False shepherds infiltrating the early church, their teaching lifestyles influencing the church, reproducing more of their kind within the church, and turning the church into an abusive setting, an abusive environment.

And folks, it's happening in our own day too, as false believers grow in numbers because of the proliferation of false gospels, sub-Christian gospels. Many people just saying I love Jesus; Jesus saved me from my sins. But there is no heart change, no fruit. They continue on in the fruit of the flesh wearing a nice face, but their hearts are not changed. They grow in numbers in a church, gain influence in churches, turn church after a church into these abusive flocks, and when the abuse absolutely metastasizes, and destroys, and kills that body, they move on to another flock and repeat the process.

So it is an important duty of pastors, elders, to watch out for false sheep, the proud and arrogant, the self-centered and the greedy, those who may at first appear to belong to the flock, but in due time their true character becomes manifest. And when it becomes manifest, something must be done.

When the pastor confronts the proud male goats, the fat sheep, they whine and they bleat, they bite the hand that's offered to help, they stir up trouble among the rest of the sheep, and they

consume an inordinate degree of time, and energy, and attention, but they do not care at all. There's a telltale sign that they do not belong there, that they are up to no good. That is, a shepherding duty is to protect who becomes a shepherd, in order that there may be faithful shepherds who love the flock, who fear God, and see their duty, and then protect the fold, protect the church from these kinds of influences.

With that in mind, I'd like you to turn to Matthew 18. As we consider a second point and think about who it is that pastors must protect. Let's consider the, the true victims of these shepherding crimes. What happens when pastors fail to protect and who is hurt by that? Number two: Who pastors must protect? Matthew 18.

Most of us are reasonably familiar, I think, with the section of Matthew 18 in which Jesus commands us to practice corrective church discipline. Matthew 18:15 and following, 15 to 20 really is the section. In a healthy church, we understand the church discipline is going on all the time and it's going on all the

time in a very positive sense called formative church discipline.

Formative church discipline is just, in the sense of making disciples and continue to teach, and instruct, and exhort toward godliness and helping people, put the, put the truth into practice, helping them to grow in the wisdom in the application, the truth. That's just formative church discipline. It doesn't feel any negative or corrective, because we all want to grow in holiness. So that's forming us. It's shaping us. We do that together, making disciples, helping one another grow.

Also though, there are times when we get crossways with the one talking to us about the truth, could be a friend or could be a family member, could be someone in leadership, as well, who corrects a, a sin issue, corrects a lack of wisdom, a foolishness or whatever. And then we don't see it the same way we get crosswise. We gotta resolve that conflict, right? That's called corrective discipline to deal with any unrepentant sin in the body. And that's what Matthew 18:15 to 20 is all about.

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What we can sometimes fail to realize is Matthew 18:15 to 20 is embedded firmly in Matthew 18, which is a, a broader context. So the context for corrective discipline actually starts back in the first verse which is really about the protecting power of Jesus and concern of Jesus to protect his sheep from stumbling blocks.

Take a look at the first six verses here, "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, 'who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?'" Now, this is shortly after the Transfiguration or Transfiguration where Peter, James, and John see Christ in power in his kingdom glory on the mountain.

They're there with Moses and Elijah who also appear there, and they're talking with Jesus about his eventual ascension into heaven from Jerusalem. So these three have really learned a lot. They've been exposed to a lot. Jesus remands them to silence until after his resurrection.

But you know, being, you being you and me being me, you know that, as they walked among the other men, walked among the

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Twelve, they're like, we got to see that and you didn't. It creates a little bit of competition, one upmanship among the disciples.

So the disciples came to Jesus and said, who then is the greatest of the kingdom of heaven? You know what Peter, James, and John are thinking? Jesus is going to look at us and say, that's you guys. He didn't do that. Verse 2 says, "He called a child to himself and set this child before them and said, 'truly, I say to you, unless you're converted and become like little children, you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven.'"

What is that to say? It's to say that children who especially in this society were never viewed by anybody, as having anything to offer. All they are is just food machines. They're costly. They, they can't even plow a field. I mean, what's a little child going to do? He doesn't have anything to offer. All he does is take up my time.

It's not until that kid gets out of that kind of young stage, past the time when he might be crippled by disease or, or, or

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die. The infant mortality rate was very high. Child mortality rate very high in these times. And so get past that time and get him to actually, him or her to do something in the field or in the home and become productive and then he becomes a contributing members, member of society. Before that, nothing to contribute.

Jesus says unless you become like a little child, realizing that with your spiritual situation you have nothing to contribute to your salvation. You're utterly dependent like a little child. A little child may know it or may not. We all know it though, become like that. Verse 4, "Whoever therefore will humble himself as this child. He is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and whoever receives one such child in my name receives me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it is better for him that I heavy a millstone be hung around his neck, and that he'd be drowned in the depth of the sea."

Wow, I can't imagine a worse way to die. I've gone down into depths of the ocean before with a weight belt and my ears unable

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to clear and that is really really painful. A heavy millstone that was used for crushing grain moved around by a donkey or an oxen. This massive upper millstone fastened around somebody's neck and then cast into the depth of the sea would cause the victim to descend at such a rate he could not clear his ears, no matter how hard he tries, he tries, he causes eardrums to burst leading to all the atmosphere after atmosphere of crushing pressure, come, to come into the inner ear, inner ear causing severe pain, adding excruciating pain on the way to a terrifying death by drowning, and suffocation, and maybe even crushing because of the depth and the pressure. Wow, that is really, really strong language from our Lord.

When he says, I don't want any of my little ones to stumble. You know what? He really means it; any of these little ones who believe in him. Talking about true believers here, not the false sheep, not the fat sheep, not the goats. True believers. Jesus is very serious in this warning about his concern to see them protected. Look at Matthew 18:7 to 9, "Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks!" Man, there are a lot of stumbling blocks out there.

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Woe to them, "for it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; nevertheless, woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it's better to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet, be cast into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out, throw it from you. Better for you to enter life with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into the fiery hell."

Notice the context of cutting off any an offending hand or an offending foot or tearing out an offending eye. Notice that it's different here than in, maybe, Matthew 5:29. In Matthew 5:29, the context there is about battling a lust. So do whatever you can to avoid being tripped up by your own lust. Just take extreme measures. I mean, he's not literally talking about it mutilating yourself. He's just talking about take whatever measures you can to deal with your sin. That's not the context here. The context here is about avoiding, at very great cost, even if it means searing pain, crippling lifelong disability. Do whatever it takes so you don't become a cause of stumbling for any other true believer.

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Now back to our thesis statement at the beginning. Shepherds protect the flock of God from the harmful influence of stumbling blocks. Many stumbling blocks in the world, many that the shepherds need to be watching out for. Those who cause people to sin in doctrine or in their practice. If your hand causes stumbling by what you do, by what you practice, by what your hands are involved in. If your feet cause stumbling by where they go, what you mobilize them to pursue and cause stumbling. If your eye, by what your eye desires, by what it seeks, by what it takes in, this is a call to self-watch, isn't it? So that you don't run afoul of the great shepherd of the sheep.

It is a lie of our present age that you can do sin and it doesn't affect anybody else. Jesus is exposing the lie. And I think it's no accident that in Matthew 5, he's talking about your lust and doing whatever it takes to deal with your lust. Take care of it internally first. Make sure it's gone because if you don't and that lust continues to brew and to grow and to leaven your whole life, you know what happens in Matthew 18? You start becoming a stumbling block to other people.

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Be sure your sin will find you out. It does come out. There is no such thing as private sin. It's all going to affect somebody. That's what Jesus is saying here, calling us to self-watch, so that we don't run, so we don't run crossways with the Good Shepherd of the sheep. He's serious about this. So causing one of these little ones who belonged to Jesus to stumble because you persuaded them to believe some false doctrine or tolerate it and follow some sinful practice; just ask you a series of questions and think about this.

Can giving someone a bad book? Oh, like Jesus calling, pointing them to some edgy podcast, turning them on to some entertaining but heretical television series like The Chosen? Can that cause stumbling? Can tolerating sin, overlooking bad doctrine, or worse, by toying with it, entertaining doubts, encouraging people to doubt, question God, challenge God, be angry at God, dialoguing with error, flirting with weird doctrines, can that cause a sheep to stumble?

Can harboring resentment and bitterness in your heart, excusing a heart of anger, nursing your hurts and offenses, can that seep

out of a poisoned heart and inject poison into others and cause them to stumble? Can your behavior, lifestyle preferences, priorities, pastimes, what you allow, what you indulge in so-called liberty issues, can that cause one of these little ones to stumble?

Can sharing gossip, spreading slander, sharing false reports with others, can this cause a believer to stumble, doubt or become confused? What about sowing discord, causing disunity, division, sowing doubt in godly leadership, can that cause stumbling? Jesus says don't you do it, don't dare.

It's only those who fear the Lord who care about this. Those with no fear of God that governs their heart, they scoff at this warning. They think you're making too much out of it. Let's keep reading. Jesus says in verse 10, "see that you do not despise," any of these little ones, "one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven."

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As the angels are dialed in by looking at the fear of God and knowing their own duty to protect these little ones, they get it. Verse 11, probably not in the text. It's put into brackets in some passages here, but "[for the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which is lost.]" And then he goes on.

And that verse does fit here, even if it was added by copyist. He says, "What do you think? If a man has one hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go search for the one that is straying? And if it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than the ninety-nine which have not gone astray."

Well, "in this way, it is not the will of your Father who's in heaven that one of these little ones perish." In light of what we read earlier from Ezekiel 34, I, I know you see the connection between this and Ezekiel 34. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who Ezekiel 34:16, he does the will of the Father. He says, "I'm going to seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick. He is the Good

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Shepherd who will care for his little ones and protect them and those who cause his little ones to stumble. The fat and the strong I will destroy. I'll feed them with judgement."

Beloved, I want you to understand this is the thinking that frames our shepherding. This is what frames our thinking as shepherds. This is what drives our concern. And it's not that any of us pastors or elders here are fearful of being cast into a fiery hell. We obviously want to avoid such a fate at all costs. But the stronger motivation for us, it's not craving fear. It is a God-given spirit generated love for God and his flock.

We love the Lord Jesus Christ, and so when, when he takes special attention for people like this, man, we love what he loves. We want to do what he does, want to be part of that process of protection. Oh, but we also love these little ones, these sheep, those who are prey, those who are prone to wander. We understand that; we're just men of flesh like everybody else.

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So we get it; if we want to help folks, you just need to understand God has given us the love of Christ in our hearts for all of you, for the flock of God, for believers young and old, rich and poor, wise and foolish. By the Holy Spirit we've become partaker of the love of Christ, and we really do care to see his people, his true sheep, his little ones cared for, and tended, and well fed, and well watered, safe and sound, that they can grow up healthy, strong, and bring glory to God.

Let me give you a short list of people whom pastors watch over and protect. First, pastors start by watching themselves. We're sheep. We got to watch over our own souls, got to guard our own hearts for signs of drift. 1 Timothy 4:16, "pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; and persevere in these things, for as you do this you will save both yourself and those who hear you."

Pastors got to watch themselves. Pastors, next, number two, have to watch over individual sheep and make sure individual sheep are not being deceived and being slipping away following prey to the world, the flesh, and the devil. Jesus warns in John

10. John 10 is an awesome passage. I just, I debated on whether or not to just preach that, but I go back to it.

I just have limited time, but Jesus warns in John 10:10, he says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. He doesn't enter into the sheep hold through the sheep gate." That is he, he avoids the qualification issue, he avoids the calling issue. He avoids the appropriateness of his being there. He hops the fence through some other means and makes himself a shepherd.

And we got a lot of self-appointed shepherds out there, a lot of people being promoted into eldership. They have no business being there. They're not qualified, they're not gifted, they're not trained. They, they have, they have no business being there. Thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. He strikes the weak sheep wandering at the outskirts of the fold, wandering into dangerous briars that that attach themselves to the soul and pull them away.

Just insert a, insert a footnote here, how is it that pastors practice a constant self-watch while they are at the same time

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also watching over the flock of God? Simple. We follow the priorities of Peter that he gave in Acts 6:4, prayer and ministry of the Word. Prayer and ministry of the Word.

Pastors have to be men like Ezra. Ezra 7:10, "Who had set his heart to study the law of God and to practice it and to teach his statutes and judgments in Israel." You know what Ezra did first, he tended to himself, his own heart. He studied the Word of God so that he would grow and, in, out of his growth, then he turns and teaches the statutes and judgments in Israel.

He teaches what he knows by experience. He teaches what he has practiced for himself. He teaches the comfort of God for people because he's been comforted. He teaches the warnings of God because he's felt the warnings. We're engaged in a spiritual warfare, so those of us called to lead from the front on the battlefield have to know the nature of the battle. We have to recognize the strength and the superiority of enemy forces. We have to see the contrast with our own weakness and vulnerabilities. And we have to look to the God who has all power and all wisdom.

With that battle ready mindset, we put on the full armor of God every single day. And we pray for our fellow soldiers as we help them follow our example and do the same thing. So point one: Pastors looking after themselves, Point two: Pastors looking after individual sheep. They're one and the same.

Third, pastors watch over the local church. And what I mean by that is not individual people, but the corporate body. We have to watch over, attend to the health and the morale of the whole church. We build toward a collective discernment together, a corporate maturity. That's Ephesians 4:11 to 16. You can jot that down and read it later. But just as a disease can enter into a flock of sheep and afflict it and cause the sheep to become sick, sometimes causing a lifelong weakness, disease, even death, so also like a spiritual disease, unhealthy trends, ungodly habits of speech, unrighteous practices, these things destroy a local church and harm it's witness.

And so in the local church, pastors protect the doctrinal purity of the church from false teachers and false teaching. We

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live in a hyper connected age and so false doctrine is entering into the homes and the hearts of church members all the time without a visit from a visible, physically present false teacher. It's coming through the Internet; so hard for us to deal with. But we take Paul's warnings, warnings from Jude and Peter about the damage that's caused, to by impure doctrine entering the church. And we're trying to be watchful, helpful.

Pastors also must protect not just the doctrinal purity of the church, but the practical purity of the church from influences of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Whether members are led astray and enticed by their own lusts, or whether they're disobedient people who are influencing them to stray, wander, experiment, sinful habits, and sinful attitudes, whatever the case. Following after cultural trends, following after what's cool, what's accepted in society, John says, do not love the world or the things in the world, don't love it, turn away from it. Love the father only.

Pastors protect not just the doctrinal purity of the church, the practical purity of the church, but also the unity of the

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church, and the harmony of the church, so that the church stands firm in one spirit. Philippians 1:27, "With one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." And he says this in verse 28, Also "in no way alarmed by your opponents - which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you and that too, from God," to protect the unity and the harmony of the church.

And we not only strive together, one mind, one Spirit, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, but we also, we don't worry about those people who are opponents, who oppose, who cast aspersions on the church, those who criticize and ridicule, those who eventually in this age are going to start to persecute. We're not worried about our opponents. That's just a sign of destruction for them. But it's an affirmation of salvation for you who continue to follow in that environment.

We have to guard against divisions in the body. 1 Corinthians 1:10, those who cause division, Titus 3:10, so that no bad influences, no false doctrine, no lovers of iniquity, no bad actors come and destroy the unity of the harmony of the church for which Christ died to make them.

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One fourth thing the pastors protect is the witness of the universal church. How do we practice? How can we be responsible for the witness of the universal church? That's about doing our part in our local church so our local church doesn't cast a bad witness on the church universal, so that when people look at our church, they say that's what the church of Christ universally should be. And they don't look at our church and say, oh, this is a sin loving, sin tolerating church. This is a culturally affirming church. And that's what the body of Christ universally is.

So we have to, this is about the affirmation, cooperation, participation with cultural movements, maybe even with other churches, sometimes withholding that affirmation of other churches because they've drifted, or perhaps warning about the weakness, decline, falseness of other churches, or on the other hand, affirming them, affirming them. So when pastors don't protect, the ones that they're charged to protect are harmed, caused to stumble, led into sin, whether doctrinally or practically.

This leads us to a Third Point number three: How pastors must protect, how pastors must protect. So we think about the duty to protect the flock. Shepherds grow in obedience to and wisdom in following several biblical practices and doing these things, maintain these habits in our ministry, protecting these several practices of church life.

This is how Christ protects his church. First, pastors protect baptism and membership. Baptism and membership. Scripture says the church of Jesus Christ is comprised of believers who are regenerate, born again, spirit filled. That's it. Those are the occupants of this set we call the church: Regenerate, born again, spirit filled.

The church is a community of those God chose to partake of the new covenant inaugurated in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. We're those who have received, according to Ezekiel 36:26, for those of all of, us have received a new heart, new spirit from God or possessed by the Holy Spirit of God, verse 27. And that is evidenced in a new walk, that is evidenced in a new way of

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living, as we obey God's statutes and ordinances, as we have an ever-increasing fruit of the Spirit in our lives, Galatians 5:22.

So when you see people who profess Christ, who don't walk in obedience, live however they want to, when you see people who don't bear the fruit of the Spirit, but actually have the works of the flesh coming out of their hearts, revealed in times of pressure, tension, trial, that's when their hearts erupt. There's a problem with that profession. There's a problem with our profession if that's happening in times of tension, and testing, and trial.

So as pastors, we do our level best to avoid baptizing unbelievers. We, we don't receive unbelievers into church membership, not knowingly anyway. We do our best to protect the process of examining candidates for baptism, applicants for church membership because brutish goats, falt, false sheep, they wreak havoc in a body, as we've already talked about. Our Lord, the vine dresser has various ways of pruning the vine and

cutting off these nutrient sucking branches that are fruitless and lifeless.

And that brings us to second thing the pastors protect is the communion and local fellowship. They protect the communion table and the fellowship that it represents. So we protect the first of our Lord's ordinances, baptism that governs who we allow and disallow into membership. We also protect the second ordinance, the Lord's table, communion; which is a symbolic meal. And the communion table portrays the basis of the church's fellowship, which is spiritual participation in Christ.

What undergirds or upholds our regular celebration of the Lord's Table is a practice of discipline, church discipline. Often we hear the reference to church discipline. We're thinking about the negative side of disciplines, the discipline, the corrective side, and that kinda, kinda raises our adrenaline level and stirs internal tension because we have to address uncomfortable, unpleasant stuff.

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But as we're in Matthew 18, part of your Bible's already warmed up. You can look at verse Matthew 18:15, "If your brother sins, go show him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you've won your brother." Yay, won your brother. You've actually sought the lost sheep, found him, brought him back, and there's great rejoicing in your heart and in heaven as well.

"But if he doesn't listen to you," verse 16, "take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, let them be to you as the Gentile, the tax collector." Those who refuse to humble themselves and repent may no longer fellowship with the local church, may no longer partake at the Lord's Table, not until they repent.

It is shocking to see how few evangelical churches practice corrective church discipline, how few pastors have the stomach for it. They readily admit it's in the Bible. They even claim to agree with it, but either ignorantly or willfully, they refuse to practice it. They just don't have the stomach for it these

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days. Many pastors don't confront people who are sinning, won't teach people how to confront sin. They skirt around that duty.

They justify themselves in doing so, by kinda misappropriating the concept of grace, perverting any resemblance to biblical grace. They say we just want to be gracious with people, and that just helps them feel justified in their conscience, that they can avoid a comfort, an uncomfortable confrontations with proud sinners. You never have to deal with the blowback.

Churches like that, pastors like that are not doing their duty to protect the church, and they will be held accountable by God for that negligence, whether it's due to cowardice or, pragmatism or whatever it is. But the arms of the fellowship are open wide to all who walk humbly before the Lord, who submit themselves to the authority of God's Word.

And this is the vast majority of the church, partaking of the church's formative discipline, receiving the pastor's instruction and exhortation, receiving the exhortation and teaching that comes out of the, the, different teaching venues

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in the church and that's taken up among the entire congregation. And, and we encourage one another day after day and exhort one another.

That's formative church discipline. It's happening all the time, happening very positively in our midst. So baptism, communion, protecting the church's entrance ordinance, and fellowship ordinance, ensuring by God's grace there's a regenerate membership and a humble, submissive, obedient membership.

Third thing the pastors protect is ordination and eldership. Ordination and eldership or ordination and leadership. Paul tells Timothy in first, 2 Timothy 2:2 find faithful men. He says, "the things you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses. Entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others," also.

Takes time to see faithfulness, doesn't it? In his first letter, 1 Timothy 3:1 to 7, his letter to Titus, in Titus 1:5 to 9, Paul lists the qualifications a man has to fulfill to serve as an elder. He has to be tested, examined. It takes time. Close

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observation of his life, gain sufficient knowledge of his life, marriage, family, overall testimony, his habits, his thinking, his disciplines, taking the necessary time, guarding against showing partiality. These are vital, vital for making a right judgement about a man's, a man's calling and qualification to ensure that the church is well served by good, godly, qualified leaders and not abused by bad, unqualified, neglectful leaders.

Go over to 1 Timothy 5, we want you to look at this 1 Timothy 5 verse 17 and following. Paul says this again, so critical to move carefully with men who are coming forward for leadership duty. Paul says the elders, 1 Timothy 5:17, "the elders who lead well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor at preaching the word and teaching.

"For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while it is threshing,' and 'the labor is worthy of his wages. Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, reprove in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God, and of Christ Jesus,

and of his elect angels, to observe these instructions without bias, doing nothing in partiality. Don't lay hands upon anyone hastily, and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself pure."

So critical to move through the process of considering someone for leadership. Slowly, as careful as we are, they're still going to be mistakes made, hidden things not seen, not revealed until later. So Paul says in verses 24 and 25, "The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgement; for others, their sins follow after." But if their sins follow after on the basis of two or three witnesses, deal with the sins, that is the process of church discipline.

That is, elders cannot be shielded from the process of church discipline just because they're in leadership. Follow the process. He goes on and tells Timothy same thing with, with, good works. Good works are quite evident. Those that are otherwise cannot be concealed. If our Lord was betrayed by Judas Iscariot, who was one of the Twelve men whom he himself appointed, if the future of Hymenaeus and Alexander's apostasy

was hidden from Paul as those men arose in leadership in Ephesus and had to be, he had to leave poor Timothy to deal with it because their sins were exposed and he had to deal with them.

Well, then who are we to believe that we could screen everyone perfectly, right? We just need to deal with what we know and what we see. We just need to be faithful to what we see. Don't need to go searching for it. Paul says here it'll come up and when it comes up deal with it. Nevertheless, the process of protecting the eldership is used of the Lord and it's used to weed out those who would endanger the flock, identify, elevate those who will love and serve the Lord in his flock as his under shepherds.

Always in our minds is the warning of Paul to the Ephesian elders. You can write this down. Don't need to turn there, but Acts 20 verses 28 to 31, as he's parting from them, leaving Ephesus to go back to Jerusalem where he's going to be arrested and then held in Caesarea for two years, then put on a boat, sent to Rome and be held there in imprisonment.

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He knows he's not going to see these guys again. He says, "Be on guard for yourselves," in Acts 20:28, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood." And then this, "I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and even from among your own selves' men will arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be watchful."

He's saying be watchful about external threats and internal threats. Be watchful. "Remembering that night and day for a period of three years, I didn't cease to admonish each one with tears." If it happened then to Timothy and Paul, it's going to happen now to the likes of us as well. And Paul continues in that section, telling the elders to observe his example. It's a reliable pattern to examine men for leadership. Again, that observation takes time, impartial judgement.

A fourth thing pastors protect in the church and structures is their affirmation and partnership. We have to protect the

fellowship of the church, internally and externally, and we have to also protect the fellowship between churches and among ministers and with institutions and organizations. As pastors and elders, we have to be careful who we're affirming, what we're affirming.

Because, especially in a media saturated modern world, Christians need help to sift through the myriad of voices that are always vying for their attention, calling for their vote, calling for their affirmation, calling for their participation. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:14, "Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers, and that's about spiritual partnership and fellowship, joining common cause with unbelievers, which here refers to religious unbelievers in religious tasks, religious endeavors.

So pastors and elders have to avoid affirmations, associations, partnership, participation of a religious nature that cause Christians to stumble or confuse Christian witness to the watching world. We can't bring a reproach upon Christ. Now, that's a lot and I know that it was a lot to try to digest.

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You're probably going to have to go back and listen again and just take some notes and think. But I can just assure you that is only the briefest of surveys on pastoral ministry.

The subject of pastoring has, has, has filled volumes upon volumes that I'm just working my way through over time in my ministry. I just tried to summarize you a few of the chief duties of a biblical shepherd to instruct, exhort, protect the flock of God in the abiding judgement of church history.

I really am saying nothing than what faithful shepherds of the past have said and what they have practiced, the legacy of their lives and their ministries, all that we study and follow. I cannot tell you, though, how much opposition us pastors face and pastors in any faithful church face, as they pursue their duties in these difficult days.

And also how much we are loved and appreciated by God's people who are often wandering for sometimes years through vast waterless places, spiritual deserts, where there is in this country, by God's judgment, a famine in the land for hearing the

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Word of God. And they wander here and there looking for a faithful church. And they, when they land on one like ours, like others, we know, they're so grateful. They're in such deep need and they know it for instruction, and exhortation, and protection.

But we are polarizing figures for sure. Pastors, elders, faithful are lightning rods in the culture. There's a dividing line and this is an experience that we grow to understand that Paul wrote about in 2 Corinthians 2:14 to 16. Here's what he says, he says, "Thanks be to God, who always leads us in his triumphal procession in Christ. And he manifests through us the aroma of the knowledge of him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one, the aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma," of life or, "from life to life."

There are many today, it's really less among the irreligious, among the atheists, among the worldly, the secularized, it's, it's really more among the religious that they react angrily

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when they sense the fragrance of, fragrance of, Christ in a pastor's ministry. I've watched this for decades as a Christian, as well-known courageous shepherds like John MacArthur or RC Sproull or lesser known but equally faithful shepherds, like Tom Askel, Don Green, Moses Estrada, Russ Brewer; others are treated with suspicion, hostility, disdain.

They're the subject of malicious attacks and terrible slanders. What's their crime? Telling the truth. Staying faithful to their calling, just trying to be the best pastor that they can, to love people, love God, love his people. But the strategy of the enemy is always to discredit faithful pastors. Just as the scribes and the Pharisees tried to do with Jesus, to trouble the sheep, turn them away from following after the ministry of faithful men. Because Satan loves to mangle souls.

The tactic in our modern day is to portray these pastors as unloving, harsh, abusive, which is diametrically the opposite of what they truly are, who God knows them to be, who the faithful know them to be. But there are many today who are doctrinally weak, biblically illiterate, religious hypocrites who are unable

to attack the sound exegesis coming out of the pulpit. They have no interest in the truth anyway.

So what they do is they react against the exhortation because the exhortation is what presses them, exposes their will, and confronts their sins. They react in suspicion, and fear, and anger. They become hostile, they strike out and they disrupt others in the flock. They start crying, abuse, and unloving. They begin a character assassination campaign to show this guy to be unloving, ungracious.

None other than John Piper identified this more than 15 years ago in something he wrote; he stated this quote. "Not feeling loved and not being loved are not the same. Jesus loved all people well and many did not like the way he loved them." End Quote. We've seen that over and over in the Gospel of Luke, haven't we? Led to his crucifixion, didn't it?

John Piper continues with this. He says, "I have seen so much emotional blackmail in my ministry, I am jealous to raise a warning against it. Emotional blackmail happens when a person

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equates his or her emotional pain with another person's failure to love. They are not the same. A person may love well and the beloved still feel hurt and use the hurt to blackmail the lover into admitting guilt that he or she does not have.

“Emotional blackmail says, if I feel hurt by you, you are guilty. There is no defense. The hurt person has become God. His emotion has become judge and jury. Truth does not matter. All that matters is the sovereign suffering of the aggrieved. It is above question. This emotional device is a great evil. I've seen it often in my three decades of ministry and I'm eager to defend people who are being wrongly indicted by it.” End Quote.

That's spot on from John Piper. Emotional blackmail is how proud, wicked goats, false sheep in our woke grievance oriented time, everybody pulling out and playing the victim card. They use this tactic to undermine and malign good men, faithful shepherds, faithful pastors. They're the aroma of death to those people, those faithful pastors. But among those who are being saved, a fragrance of Christ to God, an aroma from life to life.

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And in this true pastors and shepherds find such great joy and satisfaction. It's because we believe that we speak and through speaking in our ministry, through your ministry as well, so many are saved and sanctified to the glory of God. Many hear the Word of God, walk in blessed obedience to the Word. They learn to practice the wisdom and the fear of the Lord. They grow in holiness and this leads them into the blessedness of God to share in this communicable attribute of blessedness of God, to share in his divine happiness and joy. That is what we want as faithful shepherds for all of Christ's sheep.

Paul continues in 2 Corinthians 2:17. He recalls his, he recalls his calling; he reaffirms that. He says, who's sufficient for these things? Who's sufficient? For we're not like many who peddled the word of God, but as from sincerity, as from God in the sight of God, we speak in Christ. What do we speak in Christ, words of instruction, words of exhortation, which together provide protection. That's how we inform, the, the, protection informs and directs how pastors are exercising their oversight.

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We administrate the Church, protect any of Christ's little ones from stumbling, and in this whole process, through imperfect men, God still gives grace and he gives the increase, and he adds blessing upon blessing and joy upon joy, leading us all into satisfaction and gratitude as we walk forward in abundant joy and have full, effective, fruitful lives, and a good stewardship that we can offer to him in the end. It's what it's all about, pleasing our God, doing his will, loving him with all of our hearts, soul, strength, and mind. Let's pray.

Our Father, we're so grateful to you for appointing the Lord Jesus Christ to be the Good Shepherd. Where men have failed repeatedly, failing in their kingship, failing in the priesthood, failing as prophets, failing as mediators, failing as shepherds and leaders. In the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no failure whatsoever but absolute perfection. And by your grace, by your Spirit, you have united us to Christ.

We all partake of his shepherding ministry. He who laid himself down for the flock, who died to save his own people, He's shown himself to be trustworthy in every way. Help us never to doubt

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him. Help us to identify the voice of the Good Shepherd in those under shepherds, in whatever church they are, and to come to that voice and to trust those ministries. Help us to turn away all that would defile, all that would cause stumbling, and let us fix our gaze upon Christ, his Word, his Spirit, and your face, father. For the sake of your glory we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ we pray, and by the power of the Holy Spirit and in his ministry in our lives, we pray. Amen.