

Session 2 – Shepherds and the Flock: Seeing the Big Picture

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Synopsis: What is involved in caring for the congregation as a whole? How do the management of collective activities relate to “watching in behalf of souls”? What are practical tasks and habits for setting goals, keeping all members involved, managing moods and motivations, addressing dissent, and communicating with the flock as a whole?

A. Introduction and Background (for Sessions 2 and 3)

1. Russ and Marty’s backgrounds, biases, and limitations.
2. Rule by elders of tribes or nations is common throughout the Bible and world history, for example, beginning with the Israelites in Egypt
 - Examples throughout the Bible (132 references in OT), incl. non-Israelites (Gen 50:7)
 - There was a corporate rule & settling of individual matters (e.g. Dt 22:17; Josh 24:1)
 - Note that “tribal” elders had both a *ceremonial* (representative) function (e.g. Lev 4:15) and *executive* (decision-making) function (e.g. II Sam 5:3; Judges 21:16).
3. Early church Apostles served in pastoral roles, but transitioned local churches to elderships
4. Texts listing qualifications (I Tim. 3, Titus 1) say only a little about elder’s work & duties.
 - Implications of duties may be found in the rationale for some qualifications
5. Key texts on the work: I Thessalonians 5:12-13; I Timothy 5:17-20; James 5:14; I Peter 5:1-4; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24; Ephesians 4:11-16; Acts 20:17-35
6. A useful categorization of the types of tasks is: collective and individual. We’ll use the terms “*Flock*,” and “*Sheep*” shepherding.
 - Compare, for example James 5:14 to Acts 21:18-26.
 - These two types of work are obviously interrelated (e.g. I Cor. 5:5-8)
 - Definitions:
 - ***Flock Shepherding*** – leading collective [group participation, shared resources, cooperative actions] local church activities: decisions and instructions that affect the whole group.
 - ***Sheep Shepherding*** – protecting and developing individual Christians by watching, teaching, warning, exhorting, comforting, advising, rebuking...
7. Sheep Shepherding is preeminent (Hebrews 13:17, II Corin. 5:10)

B. Collective Activities and the Flock-Shepherding leadership/duties implied

1. Those we typically think of (note COVID-19 has amplified the duty to arrange for these)
 - Pray (Acts 2:42; 4:23, 31; 12:12)
 - Sing (Eph 5:19, & see Heb 2:12)
 - Observe Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42, 20:7; I Cor 10:16, 11:20)
 - Listen to teaching & preaching (Acts 13:1; 20:7)
 - Gather money for needy Christians (I Cor 16:1-2)
2. But many other collective work by NT churches (criteria: consensus of the group, pooled resources, joint participation, and decision/direction delegation to the elders)
 - Discuss group problems & plan to address them (Acts 6:2)
 - Select & appoint workers for the group (Acts 6:3,5)
 - Publicly condemn an unrepentant brother (Matt 18:17)
 - Initiate & explain corporate discipline (I Cor. 5:4ff)
 - Reprove elders that sin (I Tim 5:20)
 - Discuss issues & distribute the truth (Acts 15:30-31)
 - Announce decisions & give feedback (Acts 15:22, 30)
 - Select & appoint workers to go elsewhere (Acts 13:1,2)
 - Hear reports from workers (Acts 14:27)
 - Make visitors feel welcomed (James 2:2)
 - Teach unbelievers by orderly worship (I Cor 14:23)
3. Note implied decision-making, consensus building, and execution management implied in the above examples.

C. Collective Decisions and implicit Flock-Shepherding leadership in the NT

Note that some of these had explicit direction from elders (e.g. Acts 15:22).

1. Decisions
 - Deciding to allow a man to join the church (Acts 9:26-30)
 - Recruiting an evangelist (I Cor 16:10-12)
 - Sending a doctrinal letter to another church (Acts 15:22)
 - Committing to send money to needy (II Cor 8:1-12,18)
 - Selecting men to carry gifts (II Cor 8:19; I Cor 16:3,4)
 - Settling disputes between members (I Cor 6:5; Phil 4:2)

2. New Testament Actions of “Elderships” (as a group, doing both flock & sheep-shepherding). Note that, while decisions may be more difficult as a group, they are likely more circumspect. Elderships must assess needs, take initiative, push closure, judge priorities & expediencies.
 - Distributed gifts to needy (Acts 11:29-30)
 - Met to consider doctrinal questions (Acts 15:2,6)
 - Chose men to send to another church (Acts 15:22)
 - Sent a letter to other churches (Acts 16:4)
 - Met to discuss [be trained in] their work (Acts 20:17)
 - Took actions to prevent problems (Acts 21:18)
 - “Gave gifts” to (or appointed) men (I Tim 4:14)
 - Prayed for & anointed sick (James 5:14)

D. A partial flock-shepherding job description

1. Make immediate, reactive decisions & responses
 - Settle ‘arbitrary’ issues and squabbles
 - Address benevolence needs/requests
 - Address evangelism needs/requests
 - Handle unexpected ‘events’ in Worship
2. ‘Take heed’ to flock—in order to set strategic directions
 - Solicit and collect inputs/perceptions
 - Sense current and potential dangers & difficulties (personal, moral, judgmental)
 - Predict likely events, resource changes, demographics, etc.
 - Weigh the value of uses of resources
3. Make/explain/implement operational plans
 - Set guidelines & priorities for use of resources (e.g. deacons, budgets)
 - Define (write) specific deacon assignments and objectives
 - Direct & approve activities & expenditures
 - Encourage giving by teaching and explaining the work to be done

4. Provide spiritual food
 - Select and guide a preacher
 - Select and guide teachers
 - Select topics & timing for teaching
 - Plan or approve special events (e.g. meetings, workshops)
5. Provide exhortation & motivation
 - Express expectations, corrections, encouragements, public praise (Titus 1:9)
 - Plan or approve special events (e.g. special lessons or events)
6. Provide for edifying worship
 - Set guidelines for worship (who leads, order, standards)
 - Remedy unscriptural, non-edifying, or disorderly circumstances
7. Correct doctrinal error (Tit 1:9)
 - Watch for trends and errors (within the church and from other churches & religious groups)
 - Provide for protective & preventive teaching against current or potential errors
 - Address specific false teaching as it occurs
8. Seek & accept suggestions & criticism

E. Practical thoughts on Flock Shepherding related to decision-making for the group

1. It is important to know (especially well in advance) what all members are thinking (“moods”), and how they are likely to react to events and changes.
2. Mood and motivation management (building consensus and positive support)
 - a. Examples of “moods”
 - Acts 6:5 – Pleased multitude at hearing the plan for the widows’ care
 - Acts 8:2 – Mourning over the death of Stephen
 - Acts 12:5 – Anxious prayer offered for Peter’s life
 - Acts 15:31 – Rejoicing over the truth about the Gentiles’ conversions
 - Acts 21:12-14 – Tearful parting from the apostle Paul

- b. Mood and motivation management
 - Sense, anticipate, and influence “moods” if misdirected or harmful
 - Create excitement around important work
 - Useful skills/practical experience and opportunities to develop them
 - Self-regulation (II Cor 4:8) is foundational
- 3. Change (especially rapid) is difficult for almost everyone. Preparation and patience are required. (How did the Jerusalem church do it?)
- 4. The problems-to-solve, and plans-to-solve-them should be consistently repeated and explained as the context for decisions and actions. (What are the mechanisms for this?)
- 5. Group decision-making is tedious and inefficient, yet what is the wisdom in this plan?
- 6. Elders should cultivate an atmosphere that welcomes and rewards feedback. (How?)
 - a. When you ask for feedback, you will get it, and you should be prepared to deal with it. You should expect a wide variety of strong and conflicting opinions on any major decision. Those who go to the trouble to let you know, generally have opinions.
 - b. A challenge is to gauge an opinion’s strength (just a “thought,” a genuine suggestion, a strong recommendation, a conviction—with objections to other options...)
 - c. You should seek opinions from quiet members. (Who are these?) Their input is often as informative and insightful as any.
 - d. Opinions expressed are frequently more informative (to you) about the individual and the group than about the issue under discussion.
- 7. Elders must live personal examples of patience and deference, in hope that others will follow.
- 8. Elderships should never show evidence of divisiveness or ill-will among themselves.

F. Hard Questions

- 1. When does vocalized disagreement or disapproval become murmuring or factious behavior?
- 2. Are some voices in the congregation more credible (worthy to be heard) than others? Should some be discounted? How might credible voices be employed by the elders to help with issues?
- 3. Can there be an inner circle of participants, in addition to the elders, in the congregational decision-making process? If so, who should these be? What are the dangers in doing this?
- 4. To what extent must one “defend the eldership” or its decisions? Why might this be necessary? Are there times and reasons not to?
- 5. When do sheep-shepherding problems become flock-shepherding concerns—perhaps requiring announcement and explanation to the entire group?
- 6. When should public announcements be used? What guidelines should be followed?

7. How effective are public statements by the elders to address the behavior of a few compared to direct conversation with those to whom the comments or corrections are really intended?
8. Can there be an “inertia” or cumulative effect of a series of disruptive, surprising, difficult, or unpopular decisions—so that a period of ‘recovery’ (not changing things) might be wise?
9. How does the modern-day phenomenon of church-hopping influence the dynamics of congregational decision-making?
10. At what point does ineffective flock shepherding (and what does “ineffective” mean?) warrant resignation from the office or dissolving an eldership?