

THE SHEPHERD LEADER

*Achieving Effective
Shepherding in Your Church*

TIMOTHY Z. WITMER


P U B L I S H I N G
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To

The officers of Crossroads Community Church (PCA),
who faithfully shepherd the flock of God under their care

and to

Captain Nathan T. Witmer,
who bravely shepherded his troops through the valley of the
shadow of death
Operation Iraqi Freedom

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FOREWORD

IT IS BOTH an honor and a privilege to be able to write a few words to introduce and commend this very important book.

The Shepherd Leader is just the kind of book that those who know Tim Witmer and his work have been hoping he would write—an intelligent, biblical, balanced, pastoral, sensitive, and realistic exposition of the nature of true leadership in the Christian church. And there is a double bonus: this book is as *readable* as it is *interesting*. Not every study of eldership is as well acquainted with the shepherding practices of the *Nix Besser* sheep farm in rural Pennsylvania as it is with the pastoral care of the human sheep of Kidderminster during the remarkable ministry of Richard Baxter in seventeenth-century England!

This is an intelligent and informative book. Here exegesis and exposition provide a solid biblical foundation. Knowledge of the history of the cure of souls—in Scripture, in the medieval world, the Reformation, right through to the strategies of the great Thomas Chalmers in a deeply deprived urban parish in nineteenth-century Scotland—provides color.

One might expect all this on learning that Dr. Witmer is professor of practical theology at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. But what he modestly refrains from underlining in these pages, however, is that he serves simultaneously as

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the preaching pastor of a vibrant, multicultural Presbyterian church in a highly urbanized community just outside Philadelphia. Under his ministry the hundred-year-old Crossroads Church has been renewed and built up both spiritually and numerically. Indeed, even in its size it equates to what John Owen regarded as ideal for a congregation in which everyone counts, in which gifts abound, but no one is sidelined! Thus long personal experience of pastoral ministry provides relevance and contemporary wisdom. So this is also a wonderfully practical as well as instructive book. It underlines principles that ministers and leaders can employ in the specifics of their own church context, and it provides workable suggestions about how to put them into practice.

These pages have, therefore, been personally test-driven. They do not give us idealistic counsels of perfection that fail to take account of an honest reading of the New Testament and what it teaches us about the condition of Christ's flock. Professor Witmer is too good a theologian to do that. But he is also too caring a pastor not to provide us with approaches to leadership and spiritual care that are practical and workable in all kinds of situations.

To be among the congregation Tim Witmer pastors is—at least in my experience—to sense a little of what it means for sheep to be loved and cared for, well-protected in the flock, and devotedly fed a balanced and healthy diet from God's Word. There is something indefinable, atmospheric about such congregations. It is explicable only in terms of the knowledge of God, faith in and love for Jesus Christ, and a sense of the Spirit's presence. This is what unites the Lord's people together as a family as they worship, pray, and enjoy fellowship together in service and evangelism. Since these things are present in part

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as a direct fruit of Tim Witmer's ministry and leadership, when he speaks on the subject of pastoral care, we listen. And when he writes about it in this permanent form, we eagerly read. I am personally deeply grateful for our years of friendship, which have given me the opportunity to learn from him, and, in more recent days, for his immediate rapport with and help to the leadership of our congregation.

The reasons *The Shepherd Leader* has these rich and varied qualities—intelligent, biblical, balanced, pastoral, sensitive, realistic—are not hard to discover. In fact there are two reasons. Firstly, these were the qualities expressed in the pastoral care and leadership of the Lord Jesus and his apostles. And, secondly, Tim Witmer himself exemplifies them. Our Lord said that the good shepherd knows his sheep and is prepared to lay down his life for the sheep. He spends time with them, gets to know them, and brings them to the Heavenly Father in prayer. And he does this because he “loves them to death.” These are the qualities of the “shepherds after my heart” that God has promised to give to his people. When these qualities are combined with an understanding and wise application of Scripture, God's flock will be shepherded. We need this desperately today when so many are “like sheep without a shepherd.” These pages have the potential to transform the way undershepherds together lead their flocks. Few things would bring its author—and his Shepherd—greater satisfaction and joy.

Sinclair B Ferguson
First Presbyterian Church
Columbia, S.C.

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“THERE IS A CRISIS in the church!” Books like this always begin by sounding an alarm. In this case it is a shepherding crisis, or should I say a failure to shepherd. There can be no better introduction to the subject than a “real-life” scenario (details changed):

Cathy Williams, affectionately known to many as “Kate,” was born on September 22, 1953. In 1986, Cathy became a member of Covenant Church on the basis of her profession of faith and remained a member until her death on July 14, 2005. The death of Cathy Williams became a watershed moment in the pastoral shepherding ministry of Covenant Church. Coming out of a rebellious and loose lifestyle, Cathy made a profession of faith and actively participated in the life of the church. But then she began to fall into her old sinful habits. She abandoned the church and no one knew where she was; or at least no one cared to find out. Her name, however, remained on the rolls of the church, but just as a name. Shortly before her death, God placed Cathy back on the doorstep of Covenant Church. Pastoral interaction with the dying Cathy was too brief to confirm how she stood before God. In a cloud of uncertainty, Cathy was memorialized. She will have to stand before the judgment seat to give account for her life, but before that same

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throne the undershepherds of the flock at Covenant will have to give account for this one lost sheep.

How many Cathys are there in your church? What is the leadership of your church doing to care for these people? What view do your leaders hold of their identity as leaders and, therefore, what they are supposed to do? What is *your* view of the nature and function of leadership in the church? What is your *congregation's* view of the nature and function of leadership in the church?

The simple thesis of this book is, “The fundamental responsibility of church leaders is to shepherd God’s flock.” After all, the word “pastor” comes from the Latin word meaning “shepherd.” However, as you will see, shepherding is not merely the responsibility of those who are called to be pastors but also of those who are called to be elders or its equivalent in our churches. In fact, you will see that “shepherding” is at the very heart of the biblical picture of leadership. Unfortunately, this emphasis is missing in many churches.

Some years ago I attended a series of meetings designed to encourage leaders in our denomination. One well-respected pastor conducted a seminar on leadership and began by introducing us to the most important biblical metaphors for leadership. As he moved through his list of biblical terms I kept waiting for him to mention the metaphor of “shepherd,” expecting that it was certainly going to be next. However, it wasn’t on his list at all! With the concept of shepherding so conspicuously absent from meetings such as this one, it should be no surprise that the ministry of shepherding leaders is conspicuously absent in many of our churches today.

Therefore, though this is not a book on church polity, it will challenge your thinking on the nature, function, and structure of

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leadership in your church. This is important because the failure to shepherd in our churches is the simple but dangerous result when church members and leaders fail to embrace this fundamental biblical model. For example, if the church leader is called to be a “shepherd,” those chosen to serve will be different than if he is to be *merely* a “decision-maker.” Are the elders or leadership team a “board of directors” making decisions, or is it a team of shepherds caring for the flock? The answer to this question will also have an impact on whether the primary qualification for your leadership team is corporate success and experience or a shepherd’s heart. Obviously, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but what is the *fundamental* orientation of your leaders?

The failure to shepherd produces several symptoms, and we can observe at least one *micro* symptom and one *macro* symptom. The *micro* symptom can be seen in the closing verses of Matthew 9. As Jesus walked through the cities and villages of Galilee we are given the following description: “Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36). What Jesus observed among the people was described in terms that evoke frustration and discouragement: “distressed and dispirited.” These words could well be used to describe the people in many of our churches today. The sheep are frustrated and discouraged because they are not receiving the care that they need and that the Lord requires that his shepherds provide. Many of them may be spiritually hungry or may have even begun to stray. Failure to shepherd, therefore, impacts church *health*.

This leads quite naturally to a *macro* problem when these discouraged sheep wander from church to church swelling the roles of some churches while other congregations shrivel away and die. This may explain the American phenomenon of

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the apparent success and vitality of some megachurches, which grow even though church membership and attendance continue to decline overall. Thus, there is an impact on church *growth*. If we understand this dynamic we will see that “a sheep retained is as valuable as a sheep gained.”

How did we get into this predicament? There are many reasons for this development, but most fundamentally, either church leaders don't know that shepherding is what they are supposed to do, or they don't know how to do it. This book is designed to prove to you from the Bible that church leaders, specifically elders, are fundamentally undershepherds. Having proven that point, the book will then help you to implement an effective shepherding ministry in your church.

This subject came to my attention as I was doing my doctoral work at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida. Having been converted through the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ and then involved in a church plant followed by an urban church revitalization project, I was deeply concerned about the subjects of evangelism and mission. After all, in both circumstances it was urgent that the church grow in number! As I reflected on my experience, though, I came to realize that in both settings, people were heading out the back doors nearly as quickly as they were coming in the front (or side) doors, and there came a point when numerical growth stopped. How was it possible that, though we were doing the same things to reach people and were moderately successful in bringing them into the church, overall it was as if we were “treading water”: lots of activity but getting nowhere. How was this possible? This led me to do some reminiscing about my own spiritual pilgrimage. I, like so many baby boomers, grew up in the church, but when I left home for college, concern from my church ended. I never

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heard from anyone at the church, except my parents, of course. This is the reason that most baby boomers, for example, should not technically be characterized as “unchurched Harrys” *a la* Willow Creek’s lexicon, but as “prechurched Petes.” One study among baby boomers cited by Wade Roof claims that “two-thirds of all boomers reared in a religious tradition *dropped out* of their churches and synagogues during their teens or early twenties.”¹ How did this happen? Apparently, the church leaders of the “builder” generation did not do a very good job in shepherding their children. The Roof study also made the startling observation that “dropping out of organized religion during the young adult years, at least for a transitory period in a person’s life, is a deeply imbedded cultural problem in America.”² Now another generation is at stake. The millennial generation (born between 1980 and 2000) is making its impact on the culture and the church. Will our churches fail them? If they or anyone else “drops out,” will anyone notice? Will anyone respond and seek them with a shepherd’s heart? Are we going to find more “Cathys?”

An important factor to keep in mind as a church leader is the matter of our accountability for the stewardship of leadership entrusted to us by the Lord. The writer of Hebrews tells us, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account” (Heb. 13:17). The motivation for the sheep to respect those in leadership is the clear realization that these leaders will have to give an account to the Lord one day for their flocks. This is among the “texts that terrify” as one of my seminary professors used to say. It should certainly motivate us to understand

1. Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 154.

2. *Ibid.*, 56.

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what the shepherding language of “keeping watch over your souls” means.

Therefore, this book is designed to be a practical guide 1) to convince you that shepherding provides a comprehensive framework for what you need to be doing as a church leader and 2) to provide a practical guide to help you start a shepherding ministry among your people, or to improve the one you already have. Though I am a professor at a theological seminary, this is not primarily an academic work, but I hope those studying (and teaching) in seminaries will find it to be valuable. I am a professor of *practical theology*, so my motivations are pastoral with the humble desire of helping you apply these principles in your ministry setting.

The following chapters will move from the biblical and historical foundations to practical application. The first section will convince you, I hope, that shepherding is something you should be concerned about, and the subsequent sections will move toward the “how to’s” of what a shepherding plan should look like. At the heart of the “how to” section are the seven elements of an effective shepherding ministry. These “elements” are not “pick and choose.” Each of them needs to be in place if your shepherding plan is to be effective. The concluding chapters will highlight some important implications of having a commitment to shepherd the flock as well as suggest some practical ways to implement a shepherding ministry.

For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to church leaders as “elders,” reflecting what I believe to be the biblical model of leadership in the local church. If you do not have “elders” (though I hope that within these pages I can persuade you to employ the biblical terminology!), please “fill in the blanks” with the terminology used for the leadership team at your church.

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This book would not have been possible without the congregation and officers of Crossroads Community Church (PCA), who not only model these principles but allowed me the time to put them into print. Crossroads' elders are truly shepherds! I am also grateful to the faculty and students at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia), who helped me to refine and clarify the principles you find here. This material has also been impacted by the scores of churches and hundreds of officers to whom I have had the joy of presenting it over the past ten years. It's great to know that there are so many who are eager to grow in their effectiveness as shepherds. My thanks also to Mr. and Mrs. Robert Herr who allowed me to spend some time on their *Nix Besser* (None Better!) sheep farm in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Their insights in caring for real sheep have helped me to appreciate the wisdom of God in applying the metaphor to his people. I am also grateful to Marvin Padgett, Aaron Gottier, and Eric Anest of P&R for shepherding me through the development of this work, and to Larry Sibley for compiling the Scripture index. Last, but not least, I thank the Lord for my dear wife, Barbara, without whose unconditional love and support this book would still be a dream.

My prayer is that your flock will not be like "sheep without a shepherd." Rather, may it be said of you as it was said of the shepherd-king, David, "So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skillful hands" (Ps. 78:72).

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SHEPHERDS *FEED* THE SHEEP



“I will feed them 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 feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest,” declares the Lord GOD.” (Ezek. 34:14–15)

“I SHALL NOT WANT” (Ps. 23:1b) is the exclamation of a sheep contented in his divine Shepherd. This expression undoubtedly refers to the comprehensiveness of the care received by those who belong to the Lord’s flock. Subsequently, David enumerates the various elements required to nourish sheep. “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters” (Ps. 23:2 KJV). One author who was experienced with sheep wrote that “green pastures are essential to success with sheep.”¹

1. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 45.

Provision is the second fundamental human need that is met by our shepherd. So much of our lives revolves around making sure that we have “enough.” Will we have enough to buy a house, to send our children to college, or to retire? From the moment we awaken in the morning we seek nourishment, and then at noon, and then again in the evening!

With what does the shepherd-elder feed the sheep? Jesus reminded us that “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4 NIV). “As Jesus’ undershepherds, they [elders] guide his sheep to the green pastures of His Word and feed them spiritual food.”² The Word of God is that which satisfies the souls of the people of God. This is the key to true contentment. Jesus quoted these words in the context of his temptation in the wilderness. After forty days of fasting, Satan knew exactly where to attack the Savior. Even as the Lord had provided for the needs of his flock as they wandered in the wilderness, so Jesus knew that his sustenance would come from his Father, who meets man’s most basic need.

Meeting the need for God’s truth is a key to the health and growth of his people. The “flock of Christ cannot be fed except with pure doctrine which is alone our spiritual food.”³ This must be a key concern for the shepherd-elder. Returning to the reinstatement of Peter (John 21), Jesus uses the simple word for feed (*boskein*) in two of the three responses to his assertions of allegiance. Trench comments on the use of *boskein*:

Whatever else of discipline and rule may be superadded thereto, still, the feeding of the flock, the finding for them of spiritual

2. Simon Kistemaker, *Peter and John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 194.

3. John Calvin, *Commentaries*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 22:144.

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food, is the first and last; nothing else will supply the room of this, nor may be allowed to put this out of that foremost place which by right it should occupy.⁴

Remember that the Lord in Ezekiel's day indicted Israel's elders for failing to fulfill their responsibility to feed the flock:

Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock." (Ezek. 34:2–3 NIV)

A fundamental responsibility of any and every shepherd is to assure that the sheep are well nourished.

What can an elder do to insure that his flock is well fed? As we apply the macro-micro distinction to feeding the sheep, you will see the breadth of the shepherd's responsibility.

Macro-feeding

Macro-feeding is the leaders' responsibility to oversee the public ministry of the Word of God. This not only includes the preaching of the Word from the pulpit but the ministry of the Word in education classes as well as in small group ministry. They are responsible to be certain that what is being presented in the public ministry of the Word is the unsearchable riches

4. Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner, and Company, 1894), 86.

of the inerrant, inspired Scriptures. The Word of God is the food that will nourish and encourage the sheep. The elders of the church must assure that the public “Word” ministry of the church provides a healthy, well-balanced spiritual diet for the flock. The wise pastor will depend on *sola scriptura* as the food that is fed to the flock. It is only through the Scriptures that the sheep will be adequately nourished. It is only through God’s Word that the flock will be able to withstand the attacks of the enemy of their souls. As many shepherds have drifted away from the staple of God’s Word, their flocks have been malnourished, becoming gaunt and weak in their faith.

The pastor should also be concerned to represent *scriptura tota* (the whole counsel of God) in his preaching ministry. The best way to provide this balanced diet is through the systematic expository preaching of the Scriptures. Verse-by-verse preaching from whole books of the Bible serves many purposes, including the following:

1. *It identifies exactly what is the heart of the Christian message.* “We are not expounding a passage from either secular literature or a political speech or even a religious book, let alone our own opinions. No, our text is invariably taken from God’s Word.”⁵ People can hear about politics, the environment, or the economy anywhere, and by people who are likely to be better qualified in these categories. What the sheep need is the food that their Good Shepherd provides in the inspired revelation of his Word.

2. *It requires that the shepherd concern himself with the intent of the Divine author for every text.* The Lord gives us the Scriptures

5. John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1982), 126.

with his purpose in mind. The faithful expositor will seek this purpose rather than yield to his own whims and impose his own agenda in the ministry of the Word.

3. It respects the integrity of the textual units given through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

I point to the fact that no one ever thinks of teaching the textbook of any other science in any other way. What would be thought of the master who professed to teach a system of geometry or mechanics by commenting in a brilliant way on one and another apothegm selected from the author.⁶

Every text is within a context designed by the divine author. An effective preacher takes into account the larger textual unit, the context in the book as a whole, and its place in the overall span of biblical revelation.

4. It keeps the pastor from riding his favorite hobby horses. We are all human and have our own interests and even our affinities when it comes to biblical texts and doctrinal truth. You may have heard of the preacher who, at the end of every sermon, regardless of the text would add, “and now a few words about baptism.” Moving systematically through the Scriptures will help provide a balanced diet for the flock and will also help us to avoid our “pet peeves”!

5. It requires the pastor to preach the “difficult” or obscure texts and “challenging” truths of the Bible. While there are truths that

6. R. L. Dabney, *R. L. Dabney on Preaching* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1979), 79.

we enjoy preaching, there are also those which are more controversial and we (or our people) might like to avoid. For example, many are eager to preach on the Lord's order for the family in Ephesians five, but prefer to stay clear of Paul's direct preaching about predestination and God's sovereignty in the first chapter. Faithful expository preaching requires that these hard truths be wisely fed to the flock. Your congregation will appreciate the fact that you give them the milk and the meat.

6. *Expository preaching will encourage both pastor and congregation alike to become students of the Bible.* As the preacher works through particular books of the Bible, the congregation will learn what to look for in the biblical text and how to apply it to their lives. Dabney writes, "A prime object of pastoral teaching is to teach the people how to read the Bible for themselves . . . he should exhibit before them in actual use, the methods by which the legitimate meaning is to be evolved."⁷ Ferguson adds, "it is chiefly by the exegetical method of preaching that the individual pastor is most likely to grow as a student of Scripture, a man of God, and a preacher."⁸ Those who are committed to the work of the weekly exposition of the Scriptures know the personal blessing gained from meditating on God's Word in preparation for feeding the flock.

7. *Expository preaching gives us boldness in preaching, for we are not expounding our own fallible views but the Word of God.* It is only based on this understanding that we can confidently declare the truth, identify sin, and appeal to the sinner. The promise of God is linked to his Word and not to our own wisdom.

7. *Ibid.*, 81.

8. Sinclair Ferguson, "Exegesis," in *The Preacher and Preaching*, ed. Samuel T. Logan Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986), 195.

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For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are My ways higher than your ways
and My thoughts than your thoughts.
For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there without watering the earth
and making it bear and sprout,
and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;
So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
it will not return to Me empty,
without accomplishing what I desire,
and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.
(Isa. 55:9–11)

This promise is of great encouragement for shepherds as they strive to feed the flock what they need to hear even though sometimes it might be hard to swallow.

8. It gives confidence to the listener that what he is hearing is not the opinion of man but the Word of God. It will build a sense of momentum among the congregation. They will want to return next week to hear what comes next. W. A. Criswell built the First Baptist Church of Dallas beginning at Genesis 1 on Sunday morning, continuing on Sunday evening and kept on going Sunday mornings and evenings for years until he finished the whole Bible.

9. It is of great assistance in sermon planning. When you plan a series on a book of the Bible, you don't need to wring your hands wondering what you are going to preach about next Sunday. Very few of us can live as courageously as Spurgeon who sent people home early Saturday evening and then climbed into his study to prepare for Sunday morning.

10. It provides the context for a long tenure in a particular place.
If you are serious about preaching the whole counsel of God, it will take you a long time to preach through the entire Bible!

Having enumerated these benefits of expository preaching as a means of macro-feeding the flock, the prudent pastor will consult with his elders for their insights on the overall preaching diet for the flock. What is *their* perception of what the sheep need? This can be a sensitive area, and preachers tend to be rather proprietary about their pulpits! However, if elders are truly shepherds and are in touch with the needs of the people, pastors should be eager to get the input of their elders, though the ultimate determination should be left to the preacher.

With respect to macro-feeding, the elders should also be concerned that the educational ministry of the church is well-designed and effective. So often there is little rationale to the content of Sunday school classes or its coordination with other ministries of the church. Wise elders will oversee this important ministry to assure that the sheep are receiving the food that they need. The same can be said for the small group ministry of the church. Leaders of these groups should be well trained and responsive to the direction of the elders in choosing materials.

Micro-feeding

The elders must be equipped for the *personal* ministry of the Word among the people of God as well. This can include personal opportunities for Word ministries from involvement in small groups to personal discipleship. The elder should ask the Lord for wisdom to be enabled to apply the Word to strengthen,

calm, and heal his sheep. Paul writes that those who aspire to be overseers must be “apt to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2), and this embraces both public and personal ministries of the Word. Training should be provided for elders to address the basic biblical questions that the sheep might have. They should certainly be prepared to present the gospel to those who might not have understood or received it.

Approaches to Micro-feeding

If micro-feeding addresses the elder’s responsibility to minister the word *personally* to the sheep, how might this task be addressed?

Richard Baxter’s approach to this ministry centered around the use of the catechism as a means of ministering biblical truth to the members of his congregation. This would have provided a systematic approach to biblical truth that benefited the members as well as Baxter, for whom it provided a plan to follow. The catechism also provided him an opportunity to interact personally with his people about the most fundamental concerns of the Christian life:

If we can but teach Christ to our people, we shall teach them all. Get them well to heaven, and they will have knowledge enough. The great and commonly acknowledged truths of religion are those that men must live upon, and which are the great instruments of destroying men’s sins, and raising the heart to God.⁹

In other words, we should strive at least to enable our people to understand the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Each

9. Richard Baxter, *Reformed Pastor* (1656; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1997), 113.

leadership team must decide whether you intend to approach members with a systematic engagement with the Scriptures (i.e., a catechism or similar method), or rather respond to the respective questions and concerns the members might have. Baxter identified these basic categories of believers to whom you must be prepared to minister:

1. *The Young and Weak.* This includes those who, though “of long standing, are yet of small proficiency or strength.”¹⁰ Unfortunately, Baxter observes that “this is the most common condition among the godly.” The loving shepherd needs to provide encouragement to these sheep to grow in their faith through use of the means that the Lord has provided.

2. *Those who labor under some particular corruption.* These are believers who have a chronic struggle with a particular sin in their lives. It might be pride, sensual desire, laziness, or any number of other besetting sins. The caring shepherd will have the kind of relationship with the sheep in which they are comfortable in sharing these struggles. He will also be prepared to offer prayer, Scriptural resources, personal support, and accountability as they engage in the struggle.

3. *Declining Christians.* These “are either fallen into some scandalous sin, or else abate their zeal and diligence, and show that they have lost their former love.” These cases require our careful attention and may well require the shepherding ministry of church discipline. Christians in this condition must be addressed not only for their own sake but also for the honor of

10. *Ibid.*, 97.

Christ. These are often the sheep that we would rather ignore and who out of a sense of guilt have absented themselves from the fellowship of believers. Nonetheless, the caring shepherd must be prepared to seek these strays and to assist them in repentance and restoration. This is not easy work and, in fact, can be heartbreaking. Baxter comments that “much skill is required for restoring such a soul.”

4. *The Strong.* These are individuals who are walking with Christ and serving effectively among the flock. As we saw earlier, all too often, these strong sheep are ignored since in many churches, “the squeaky wheel gets the oil.” The strong sheep need encouragement to press on in their growth in Christ as well. Take time to acknowledge the Lord’s work in their lives and to express thanks for their faithful service.

A Simple Suggestion: Focus on Fathers

According to the Bible, each family has an undershepherd as well. This undershepherd is the head of the family who has been given the responsibility to shepherd their little “flocks” in the name of Christ. Imagine the benefit to our churches if dads were equipped to provide every aspect of shepherding care. Baxter was concerned for this as well. “We must have a special eye upon families, to see that they are well ordered, and the duties of each relation performed.”¹¹ Working with fathers on these fundamentals is certainly a good place to begin.

... ask the master of the family whether he prays with them, and reads the Scriptures, or what he doth? Labor to convince

11. *Ibid.*, 100.

SO WHAT'S A SHEPHERD TO DO?

such as neglect this, of their sin; and if you have opportunity, pray with them before you go, and give them an example of what you would have them do. Perhaps, too, it might be well to get a promise from them, that they will make conscience of their duty for the future.¹²

What better way to multiply the personal ministry of the Word than by equipping dads to pray and read the Scriptures with their families. Note that Baxter suggests that we “give them an example.” How many of our families would be well fed if we merely gave some simple suggestions to their shepherds?

Get masters of families to do their duty, and they will not only spare you a great deal of labour, but will much further the success of your labours. If a captain can get the officers under him to do their duty, he may rule the soldiers with much less trouble, than if all lay upon his own shoulders. You are not like to see any general reformation, till you procure family reformation.¹³

In doing this you are not only multiplying the ministry of the Word among your people but helping fathers fulfill their God-given responsibilities. Undoubtedly, many elders will have to repent of neglecting this duty themselves in order to proceed with a clear conscience. This is progress, too, and a great place to start!

In summary, each leadership team must decide its own approach to micro-feeding. Will it be proactive in terms of providing specific devotional guides or catechisms to individuals and families, or will it be a more reactive approach in ministering the

12. *Ibid.*, 100–101.

13. *Ibid.*, 102.

Word to the needs of the members as they arise? Either way, the ongoing personal interaction of elders with members provides a vital means of ministering the Word of God to the needs of the people for their growth and development in Christ.

If you have any doubt about the fruitfulness of investing time in personally ministering the Scriptures to your flock, consider the following question, “When have *you* experienced the most growth as a believer?” For many of us this brings back thoughts of those who invested their lives in us personally in discipleship relationships. They spent time helping us understand and apply the Scriptures to our lives. A related question is, “When have you had the greatest impact on *another person’s* spiritual growth?” Again, this will probably remind you of a new believer you helped, or another individual with whom you met to direct them to biblical solutions to challenges that they faced. Some things never change. Investing time to assure that your sheep are well-nourished requires effort, but such effort will bear lasting fruit in the spiritual growth of your flock.

For Further Reflection

Work through the Shepherding Matrix together as officers and answer the following questions related to *feeding the flock* together as officers:

Are we stronger in macro-feeding or micro-feeding?

Macro-feeding

1. Are your sheep getting a well-balanced diet in the public ministry of the Word?

SO WHAT'S A SHEPHERD TO DO?

2. Have you sought to coordinate the content of Christian education and/or small groups to contribute to the balanced diet required by your flock?

Micro-feeding

3. How are you going to approach the ministry of the Word in your contacts with your sheep?
4. Will you take a proactive approach with a Bible study or catechism, or will you simply make yourself available to address questions as they come up in your shepherding contacts?
5. What are you doing to equip fathers in your congregation to feed their little “flocks” at home?

| | Knowing | Feeding | Leading | Protecting |
|--|---|--|---------|------------|
| Macro Public/Corporate Ministry | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accurate membership roles • Knowing the flock's corporate strengths, weaknesses, traits, and opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pulpit ministry • Christian education • Sacraments | | |
| Micro Personal/Relational Ministry | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing the sheep personally • Knowing which elders are caring for which sheep • Strategy for regular, personal contact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discipleship • Mentoring • Small group | | |
| Prayer | | | | |
| Ministry of the Word | | | | |