

Protecting from the World

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 4

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures . . . (Ps. 23:2 KJV)

Introduction

When you consider sheep, probably their number one enemy is their own timidity. When approached by a stranger or a predator their heartbeat increases by more than 80 beats a minute. They are easily panicked and can stampede a whole flock. When one sheep runs in fright, a dozen others will bolt with it in blind fear, not waiting to see what frightened them.

Fear is a killer. Just like the sheep, members of the local church must be protected from fear.

So in this part of the series, we wish to consider the causes and cures for fear among members in a local church.

The one objective of this lesson is to have the members focused on the Lord, instead of on their fears.

I. Causes of Fear

A. Preliminary thoughts

1. To understand this better let us first look at the causes of fear. There are at least three major causes of fear. They are: alarms, attacks, and abuse
2. Keep in mind as we consider these causes, that it is similarly applicable to the believers in a local church. We read:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters. (Ps. 23:1-2 ESV)

3. Psalm 23 is written in the words of the sheep. Notice therefore the voice of contentment, confidence and lack of fear that the sheep exhibits. Sheep will never lie down if there is cause for fear.
4. So what is the secret of this sheep?
5. Let us look at these three causes and draw our applications from them.

B. Alarms

Our church members are easily alarmed at a situation, a circumstance or strong teaching. And it becomes pertinent that elders take timely, relevant action to defuse such situations.

1. False alarm at Thessalonica

a) We read about an incident that happened in the church at Thessalonica:

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to

him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. (2 Thess. 2:1-2)

- b) The members at the Thessalonian church were alarmed that they had missed the rapture. So Paul takes time to write to them to explain the truth of the word of God.
- c) In this we can see the role of an elder.
- d) Alarms are sometimes imagined and sometimes real; nevertheless they are dangerous to the health of the local church.
- e) It is often the quick action taken by the shepherd that calms their minds.

2. Elder experience

- a) As an elder you may have experienced this at your church.
- b) Everything seems to be going well and then suddenly there is a hint of scandal, a mysterious death, a hit-and-run and it seems that the very core of the local church is shaken.
- c) Some events can become faith threatening and church splitting. Like a sudden resignation of an elder; a family leaving the local church over a disagreement; or even as silly as an intense discussion over the choice of wallpaper in the nursery
- d) These alarms may seem small, but people can easily panic.
- e) Usually it is not a question of right or wrong; usually it is a false alarm, and thank God for that. However, this is a mandate for good and timely intervention by the elders.

C. Attacks

1. Illustration of sheep and shepherds

- a) Sheep graze in the open fields, and it is important that the shepherd is positioned in such a way that he has an unobstructed view of the flock. This is because shepherds must keep a sharp eye out for predators.
- b) Vultures, dogs, coyotes, and cougars all know that lambs are easy prey.
- c) Nights are the most dangerous; wild dogs in a night of unbridled frenzy can kill hundreds of sheep. These are rarely for foraging but usually always to appease the predator's nature to hunt and to kill.

2. Varieties of spiritual wolves

- a) These wolf attacks are similar to attacks on local communities of faith. An attack affects the entire flock.
- b) We know that Paul talking to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:29 explains how fierce wolves will come not sparing the flock.

- c) We have taken the wolves to represent false teachers in the church, and that is true. However, they do come in other shapes and sizes.
- d) We know that the Christian faith is under attack at school, universities, society—through politics, mass media, humanistic thoughts, and the list goes on.
- e) Elders must watch for and grow the people of God so that they do not fall prey to these attacks.

D. Abuse

1. This is personal and is directed at the elders, the under-shepherds, who are to care for the sheep.
2. It is a sad indictment that the flock would be afraid of their shepherds, because of the “abuse” at their hands.
3. Elders are to serve not as lords and masters.
 - a) We are invited to care for the sheep, not as lord and masters but as ones who serve. We hear Jesus telling his disciples in Mathew:

But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matt. 20:25–28)
 - b) Servant leadership was modeled by Jesus Christ. He invites us as elders, to follow his example, not as those who seek vainglory but serving the people, as unto the Lord.
 - c) It may seem awe inspiring at best that members “fear” their elders, but it certainly is not biblical.
 - d) Isn’t it interesting, then, that the Lord would say in Jeremiah:

I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD. (Jer. 23:4, emphasis added)
 - e) Not fear of the world and not fear of the under-shepherd, but only the reverential fear of the Lord. That is what needs to be developed in the hearts of God’s people.
4. Elders are to serve at being role models.
 - a) We elders are to be examples to the flock and our lives worth emulating.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. (Heb. 13:7, emphasis added)
 - b) Elders are first to servant leaders and secondly their lives worth following.

- c) There has been a history of abuse in the church, and this can only be history in its truest sense, when elders honor their Chief Shepherd, and love Him and His sheep.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. (1 John 4:18)

II. Application

A. Be watchful.

1. First, as representatives of the Good Shepherd, the elders must be watchful.
2. We read in Hebrews:

"Obey your leaders and submit to them . . ." (Heb. 13:17a)

And note this...

"... For they're keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account." (Heb. 13:17b emphasis added)

B. Use the Word of God.

1. It is interesting that when confronted with an attack Paul always led the local church to the Word of God.
2. Let the Word of the God become the first recourse in any such instance. Elders must make the local church a place where the Word of God is the first line of defense.

"... For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:27)

3. Providing the local church with the whole counsel of God is the best protection against any fear. That's the New Testament pattern; it is Paul's example; it is the only way the sheep are able to say,

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." (Ps. 23:2a KJV)

4. That is a sheep that is truly free of fear.

C. Remember that timidity is not holiness.

1. We often mistake timidity to be an expression of holiness.
2. That however is the furthest from the truth. We are called to be courageous, NOT timid.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. (2 Tim. 1:7 ESV)

3. There may be many things out there that alarm and attack the sheep; but as the sheep of Lord Jesus Christ we are called to be courageous and confident, building ourselves up in the most holy faith.
4. The cure for timidity is trusting the good shepherd and the role of the elders is to build the trust in the hearts of the sheep.

Protection from the World

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Part 2 of 4

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures . . . (Ps. 23:2 KJV)

In the first of this series, we looked at protecting the sheep from fear. Now we will look at the second area of protection—protection from the flies.

III. Shepherd Talk

- A. In shepherd talk, “Summer time is fly time.”
- B. Sheep can be quite distraught because of flies and fleas. Flies make it impossible for the sheep to lie down and rest.
- C. When troubled, instead of lying down they can be found stamping their feet and shaking their heads. Sometimes to find relief, sheep will often beat their heads against rocks or bushes. They will rub their noses in the soil.
- D. In cases of extreme infestation, flies and fleas are able to lay their eggs in the moist crevices of their noses and ears. This can produce blindness and in some cases death.

IV. Shepherd’s Cure

A. Anointing with oil

“ . . . Thou anointest my head with oil . . . ” (Ps. 23:5 KJV)

- 1. Ancient shepherds poured oil on the sheep’s head to prevent flies from burrowing into the sheep’s ears and nose.
 - a) The result we already saw is v. 2. “*Thou makest me to lie down . . .*”
 - b) A sheep that is lying down in summer must most certainly be free of flies.
- 2. Falling prey to “little things”
 - a) Many local churches have successfully avoided ravenous wolves only to fall prey to these pesky flies.
 - b) It is the little foxes that have often spoilt the vineyards.
 - c) It’s often the “little things” that cause people to get discouraged, upset or offended.
 - d) Expression of flesh: It is the liberal expressions of little fleshly desires that cause a great deal of irritation, unhappiness, joylessness and frustration among the flock.
 - e) Starts small but ends big: We read in Ecclesiastes:
Dead flies make the perfumer’s ointment give off a stench. (Eccl. 10:1a ESV)
 - f) Small flies do cause big trouble. And often members can fall prey to the little things of the flesh.

3. Work of the Spirit of God

- a) On one hand are the flies; however, on the other we thank God for the work of the Holy Spirit. He cares enough to prevent even these little things from spoiling our joy.
- b) **Spirit-filled:** We know that a Spirit-filled life is a joyful life.
- c) A person walking in the Spirit does not show the elements of the flesh—irritation, bitterness, and impatience being some of them.
- d) **Picture of the Holy Spirit:** We know from the Bible that oil is a picture of the Holy Spirit.
- e) In the New Testament, one of the usages in Greek for the word anoint is *chrío*, which means “to smear or rub with oil.”
- f) This must hold true for the flock of God, so that these pesky flies are not hurting the flock.
- g) **Full surrender:** When the elders can lead and teach their flock to fully surrender to the control of God’s Spirit, they’ll find the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23).
- h) And we know where there is the Spirit of the Lord, there is freedom, and in this case freedom from the pesky flies.
- i) It is only by the Spirit-filled, Spirit-led local church that will experience freedom from the pesky issues of the flesh.

B. Avoid overgrazing

1. Favored spots

- a) Sheep have this peculiar preference for certain favored spots. These areas are quickly laid bare; mixed with water the entire area becomes muddy and slushy—a perfect breeding ground for flies.
- b) The shepherd in handling his flock will keep them on the move. Not staying in one pasture land prevents these pests from completing their life cycle, thus avoiding infestations.

*“He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”
(Ps. 23:3 KJV)*

2. So what is the application?

- a) We as elders should not to be found teaching one favorite theme or topic, or even “allowing” the church to be overly focused on one particular aspect of Christian faith, but to systematically teach the flock the “whole counsel of God.”
- b) We read Paul declaring in Acts:
“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” (Acts 20:27 ESV)
- c) While it true that we cannot fully exhaust any one topic even after lifetime of preaching, the intent of all our preaching must be to “lead the sheep along the paths of righteousness.”

V. Role of an Elder

- A. As an elder you may have already experienced instances where one church member is upset over a harmless remark made months ago, or a phone call that was not returned, or an incident even they don't clearly remember.
- B. These minor irritants are like the flies that may seem small, but when they complete their cycle, it can be quite destructive.
- C. We read in Hebrews:
See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled. (Heb. 12:15)
- D. Just like a root that grows underground and does not spring up till much later, bitterness, hurt and resentment can grow to cause trouble and defile many.

VI. Conclusion

- A. We as elders must keep an eye out for little things that can cause trouble and to take action as led by the Spirit, and
- B. We must help the flock move on by leading them in the paths of righteousness.

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Part 3 of 4

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures . . . (Ps. 23:2 KJV)

VII. Social Behavior

A. The social behavior of the sheep prevents them from lying down if there is friction within the flock.

1. We know among hens there is something called the “pecking order;” similarly among the sheep there is what is called a “butting order.”
2. Each sheep tries to usurp authority over the other; however, it is interesting to note that at the presence of their shepherd they seem to settle down.

B. This doesn’t seem too different from our social behavior, does it?

1. And, it is even true that only when we become acutely aware of the presence of our Lord in our lives that snobbery and rivalry seem to disappear.
2. It is only when we are close and intimate with Christ that we are at rest.

VIII. Friction Will Exist

A. Preliminary thoughts

1. A story is told of a man who was fed up of conflicts. His desire was that he would not have any problems. He was promptly shown a cemetery and told, “See them? Those are the only ones who have no conflict!”
2. Being humans we know that conflict is almost a certainty, in the local church.
3. Social behavior dictates that conflicts and frictions will occur and that elders will need to be intentional about managing it to avoid escalation.

B. Causes of conflict

1. Some conflict is due to pride and selfishness.
“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?” (James 4:1–10 ESV)
2. Some conflicts come about because of lack of forgiveness.
“If your brother sins against you . . .” (Matt. 18:15–35)
And it goes on to talk about forgiveness and on how handle such situations.

C. The difference between conflict and friction

1. While these are true about conflict, friction is different.

2. Friction is almost intangible.
3. Friction is not even disagreements over theology and doctrines.
4. In most cases, it is difficult to identify the issue.
 - a) If a member sins, there is the process of church discipline.
 - b) If they have trespassed there is the recourse of forgiveness.
 - c) But what do you do with a mild but constant and yet unexplainable irritation?
5. It feels too small to worry about, and even too undefined to do anything about. And so we tend to shrug it off as inconsequential but is it really?

IX. Example of Euodia and Syntyche

We don't know much about them but we know enough to know there was friction between them.

A. About them

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in [the cause of] the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.
(Phil. 4:2–3 NASB)

1. Fellow workers
 - a) They were believers who had worked closely with Paul for the cause of the gospel.
 - b) The Greek word used to describe the nature of work is "*fellow athletes*."
 - c) They were one team and were good at what they did. Yet there was friction.
2. No accusation
 - a) There is no accusation of doctrinal disagreement, nor does the passage indicate a specific sin. If that were so, we know Paul would have pointed that out and even corrected it.
 - b) It doesn't seem "huge" compared to what had happened in the church at Corinth; however, it was important enough for Paul to address them specifically.

B. So what's the problem?

1. Some have called these women in jest, "*odious*" and "*soon touchy*"—one was abrasive and the other sensitive.
2. While these may have been true, we can't be sure. However, there is one thing we can be sure about and that is the injunction.
3. The injunction
 - a) For them to agree in the Lord, and
 - b) For the yoke fellow/true companion to come alongside and to help these women.

4. Personalities are different.
 - a) In any local church we will notice there are some who are strong, and then there are others who are weak; yet the truth is that not one is necessarily better than the other.
 - b) We are like the five fingers that all look different and yet have a symmetrical beauty and functionality about us.
 - c) We come packaged as different individuals with different personalities and sometimes we stick out like sore thumbs.
5. And yet in Jesus Christ we are fit together perfectly.

He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love. (Eph. 4:16 NLV)

- a) The key is to be “in Jesus Christ.”
- b) We must remember that not one human personality is better than the other, and that the only personality worth pursuing is that of Lord Jesus Christ.
- c) And we know that will happen since we are to be conformed to His image.

C. So what does Paul do?

1. Paul appeals both directly and individually. He asks them both
“... To be of the same mind in the Lord.” (Phil. 4:2b NIV)
2. You will notice that this is a repeat of the injunction from chapter 2 of the same book.
“Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 2:2–5 ESV)
3. While we don’t know the exact nature of the problem between Euodia and Syntyche, we are provided here with a panacea, if you may. The cure for every problem even friction, is to have the mind of Christ.

X. Role of the Elders

A. Syzygus

1. We also read Paul entreating Syzygus—“true yokefellow” or “true companion”—to help these women (Phil. 4:3).
2. The actual identity of this person is unknown. We don’t even know if “Syzygus” is a proper noun or an adjective. However, in the role of the “true yokefellow” we can see that elders play the role of helping the flock get along and be in the same mind as the Lord.

B. Focus their attention

1. We saw previously that sheep who are butting heads will ease off at the presence of the shepherd.
2. As shepherds of the local church we therefore have the role of focusing the attention of the sheep on the Good Shepherd. We know it is the conscious awareness of His presence alone that will move our attention away from ourselves.
3. It is our role to help them to:
 - a) Resolve misunderstanding
 - b) Live in harmony
 - c) Prevent issues from escalating to where the devil gets a foothold
 - d) Deal with issues in a God-honoring way

C. Focus your attention

1. Not just focusing their attention on the Lord but also your attention on them.
2. In caring for the sheep there must be a constant eye out on the flock for wounds often as a result of infighting.
3. It is said that at a sheep show, sometimes a defective animal may be presented as a perfect specimen. This can be done by clipping and shaping their wool and making them look presentable on the outside. A skilled judge, however, is able to check and quickly determine:
 - a) The condition of the skin,
 - b) The cleanliness of the fleece, and
 - c) The contour of the body,
 - d) And thus identify the health of the sheep.

No one can fool him, or as the phrase goes, "No one can pull wool over his eyes."

4. I pray that elders would be focused on the care of the sheep; and just like the judge, no one will be able to pull wool over their eyes about the hidden wounds or bruises that affects the health of their flock.

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Part 4 of 4

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures . . . (Ps. 23:2 KJV)

We will now see how food is an important criterion that must be fulfilled before sheep will lie down to rest. A hungry sheep will not lie down.

XI. Role of Food

A. Indicator of health

1. Feeding is good for the sheep; in fact it is a strong indicator of health. Healthy sheep are eager to eat and are easily drawn to good pastures.
2. Apart from a good herding dog, a trough of grain is a good way to gather sheep. The possibility of getting food tends to make sheep friendlier and less intimidated by humans.

B. Quality

1. Not all pasture is the same and the importance of a quality pasture cannot be adequately stressed enough.
2. A quality pasture is one, which provides both energy and bulk for the sheep.

C. Quantity

1. People of Israel were promised a land that flowed with milk and honey.
2. Spring and summer are the peak season when pastures are at their most productive stages. The pastures provide feed for the cattle, which in turn helps to produce milk; and the blooms attract the bees, which in turn produce honey.
3. The entire environment seems divinely blessed. Therefore a land flowing with milk and honey is a land of plenty.
4. Such pastures are good grounds for a content sheep, and a content sheep is a sheep that will willingly lie down.

XII. Table Lands

A. Every shepherd knows that the best pastures are higher up on the mountain plateaus.

1. Therefore, a shepherd will try to get the sheep to that higher ground.
2. Getting the sheep up here on the plateau may be a task, but once here the pasture is luxuriant and abundant.

B. Every shepherd knows that plateaus offer protection.

These flat lands provide unobstructed view of the sheep, and the shepherd is able to keep an eye out for danger.

C. Interestingly, such plateaus are called “tables” or “mesas.” In fact, “mesa” has a Latin origin and in Spanish it means “table.”

1. We are reminded the words of the sheep in Psalm 23.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. (Ps. 23:5 NASB)

2. This is a table of abundance in an environment of protection.
3. What a wonderful picture of the care provided us by the Good Shepherd.

XIII. Application

A. Spiritual hunger

1. There is something wrong with the local church that is not interested in studying God’s Word. It should be a cause of grave concern to any shepherd.
2. Spiritual hunger is uniquely different from physical hunger. With spiritual hunger, the more you feed, the more you hunger.

B. Intentional elders

1. Elders have to be intentional about feeding the flock under their care.
2. Paul tells Timothy:
“Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.” (1 Tim. 4:13)
3. We can see that the emphasis on public reading indicates that this is happening in the context of the local assembly.
4. We also saw from Acts 20:27, that Paul was intentional in providing the whole counsel of God.
5. Elders must be intentional both with the quality and the quantity of food and that is God's design for His flock.

XIV. God as a Shepherd

A. God is the Good Shepherd.

B. Contrast

1. In Ezekiel, we see God castigating the shepherds of Israel and then providing in Himself the kind of shepherd that the flock so desperately need.
2. Notice as we read this passage the four areas that we have been discussing: fear, flies, friction, and food.

3. Reading from Ezekiel 34:12–24:

As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep . . . (Ezek. 34:12)

a) The first element: **Fear**

. . . and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³ And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land . . .

b) The second element: **Food**

And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD . . .

c) The third element: **Flies/Care**

¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice . . .

d) The fourth element: **Friction**

¹⁷ “As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. ¹⁸ Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? ¹⁹ And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

²⁰ “Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, ²² I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³ And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

XV. Conclusion

- A. God holds the elders to a high level of intentional care and protection of the sheep, and
- B. God provides in Himself the gold standard of what a shepherd is meant to be.
- C. When elders emulate their Chief Shepherd, the flock under their care will lie down to rest in green pastures.