

What does shepherd mean?

noun

- a person who tends and rears sheep.
- short for German shepherd.
- a member of the clergy who provides spiritual care and guidance for a congregation.

verb [with object]

1 tend (sheep) as a shepherd:

- give guidance to (someone), especially on spiritual matters: she had to submit the control of her career and money to a group who shepherded her.
- carefully manage (resources or an organization): it was she who shepherded the organization through the current transition

2 guide or direct in a particular direction: we were shepherded around with great ceremony.

What I found lacking in these definitions was the idea of protection.

In Luke 4, we find the thesis statement of Jesus' earthly ministry (Luke 4:16-21 ESV). This is where the good shepherd begins to gather his sheep, liberating them from their oppression.

16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. 17 And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

20 And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

The spirit-filled Son of God was announcing the priorities of his shepherding ministry.

Today. This is fulfilled in your hearing.

The spirit of Lord was upon Jesus.

- The poor hear good news of the kingdom.
- Captives hear about liberty.
- The blind hear the good news of restored sight.
- The oppressed receive liberation.

The harsh reality of our world today: 38% of girls 16% of boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18. 1 of 4 women and 1 of 6 men have been sexually abused. Surely this abuse is something Jesus would call oppression, and something he desires us to focus on. The good

shepherd surely desires his undershepherds to be aware of these realities and to protect those within their care and to be a source of hope and encouragement to those outside of the church.

Sexual abuse is usually associated with deep betrayal. Most of those sexually abused know their abuser. Only 7% of abusers are strangers. 34% are family members. 59% are acquaintances. Studies have shown that the average abuse survivor doesn't disclose until they are 52. All of these statistics are just the tip of the iceberg, as they represent only those willing to share - i imagine there is much more hidden beneath the surface, submerged under waters of shame and secrecy. Pastor Justin Holcomb says that the violation of personal intimacy and boundaries brings a disgrace that grinds people down, leaving them feeling lonely, filthy, worthless, repulsive, hopeless, and unwanted - sometimes for a lifetime.

At the outset of his ministry we see the spirit of the Lord God upon the Son of God announcing that he would bring liberation and healing and hope to the oppressed and hurting. To the people God is calling to himself. Jesus came not as a warrior that would overthrow Rome for the Jewish religious rulers or revolutionaries, but one that would by his example and works overthrow a world built on power and the right of the strong to rule.

The good shepherd arrives to shepherd his sheep, to build and care and protect his flock, not because they are strong, or perfect, or unharmed, but because they are his, because he has chosen them and he calls to them. And so He trained his disciples, teaching them how to screen out wolves and how to protect those in their flock. He taught them how to defend the sheep and care for them.

Jesus taught them that authority and power was for service, and not for personal benefit. Matthew 20:25 "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 26 It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant... Leadership was for the purpose of shepherding and care.

Peter, who Jesus commanded, "tend my sheep," John 21:16, described the task of pastors, of shepherds, this way. 1 Peter 5:1 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2a shepherd the flock of God that is among you,

"Shepherd the flock," he says. How were they to shepherd?

- To exercise oversight, but not under compulsion (not needing to be forced) 2b exercising oversight, not under compulsion,

- Willingly, As God would have (desiring to serve others) and not to be served. 2c but willingly, as God would have you;

- Eagerly, not for shameful gain (ready to do good for the flock, not themselves) 2d not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

- As an example, not domineering (do as I do, not just 'do as I say.')

3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

- As a shepherd working under the chief shepherd (as one who must give an account)

4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

- Humbly, as this is the proper clothing of all Christians, and especially shepherds.
(careful, open to inspection by others,, ready to learn, accountable)

5b Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

What were they to avoid?

Shameful gain - taking money and using people for their own purposes.

Domineering - improper use of power. Badgering, forcing - pushing

To be an Example, calling people to follow instead of barking orders, telling them what to do, controlling.

Shepherding the flock, not accruing awards or building a platform or building an institution or a kingdom that brings them glory.

We see here the importance of **training** leaders well, of screening out the unqualified, of focusing on **protecting** the flock, raising the alarm and **reporting** when someone has done wrong, and **caring** for those in your charge and those who have been hurt.

Paul, that great pioneer missionary and church planter, assigned the leaders of the church the job of protection. He made them aware of the risk and challenged them.

Acts 20:28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

The flock. Purchased with his own blood.

The Holy Spirit makes pastors overseers.

Self-watch. Watch over the flock. Shepherd them.

His message: Care. Care. Care. For the church.

His warning:

Wolves are coming. They won't spare the flock. **AND** false teachers will come. They will twist things and draw away disciples. Two things will happen. Wolves will come AND false teachers as well. Faithfulness to the truth, yes, but also faithfulness to the shepherding task.

2 Timothy 2:2 "what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."

Find the right shepherds: Those who faithfully teach the truth and who care for the sheep Jesus has gathered. Truth and Care.

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Pass these lessons on, for the good of the flock. **Train** up faithful leaders, **Screen** out the wolves, Be faithful! **Protect** the flock, **report** when things go wrong, and be sure to **care** for those who have been harmed.

David, that great king and giant slayer, was also a shepherd. Psalm 78:72 describes his work: With upright heart he shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand.

Heart & Hand. Uprightness. Skill. This is how you shepherd.

However, David failed to **protect**, to **train** his heart over the long-term. He did not **screen** out opportunities for sin. Without accountability, neither Bathsheba nor Uriah were **protected** from his actions. No one raised an alarm and **reported** the king to the people. The victims of his crime were left without anyone to **care** for them. But the Lord knew. The Lord cared. He sent Nathan to tell a story.

2 Sam 12:1 And the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. **2** The rich man had very many flocks and herds, **3** but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. **4** "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

The confrontation over Bathsheba

The rich man - with his power, took the poor man's lamb.

He took and he devoured.

2 Sam 12:5 David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! **6** He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

Devoured without pity.

The proper target of anger. Worthy of punishment, justice, and accountability.

7 Then Nathan said to David (What a moment. What a brave man), "You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. 9 Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. 10 Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'

The Lord said, look at what you had in your hands. Look what I gave you. Look at what did you do with it, with your power.

You pushed past the boundaries created by the word of God. Forgot your training.

You despised God's word which would have warned you to protect yourself and others.

You struck down Uriah and took his wife. (9)

YOU TOOK (10) David lost faithful friend, he and Bathsheba lost a child, He would lose two more sons to violence and learn that his daughter, Tamar, was violated by her brother Amnon. Absalom kills Amnon. Joab kills Absalom.

We are living in a time where we've seen lots of ministry failure from prominent public leaders. We've seen leaders who have

- Failed to restrain their appetites
- Covered their own sins with excuses
- Failed to defend the harmed
- Failed to rebuke those in sin
- Failed to protect people from abusers
- Covered for the sins of others to preserve the reputation of the church.

Amidst all of this, precious individuals are damaged with trauma and the consequences of being abused. Health impact, relational impact, economic consequences.

Leaders of the church must do better, or there will be judgment. The church will go on, of course, but churches will be damaged or destroyed.

James, the brother of Jesus, warns shepherds: James 3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

Ezekiel spells out God's expectations in greater detail: Ezekiel 34:1 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds **feed the sheep**? 3 You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, **but you do not feed the sheep**. 4 The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have

ruled them. 5 So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; 6 they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

Jesus has compassion for his sheep.

The shepherds here have all the goods and all the power.

But not caring for the sheep.

They had all the information and doctrine and a culture to support the worship of God, but their behavior did not line up.

You did not strengthen the weak...

YOU DIDN'T SHEPHERD

Pastoring - rightly ordering the church. Studying the truth. Sharing the whole counsel of God. DON'T make the mistake regarding the feeding of the sheep - this isn't preaching. This is caring - defined within the passage.

But people need shepherds because they need care and compassion and help. They need shepherds to behave like shepherds.

They need protection from wolves - from those who would abuse them.

Judgement.

Ezekiel 34:7 "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 8 As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, 9 therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 10 Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

God says, "I am against the shepherds" bc they refuse to be shepherds

Whatever cultural or systemic or ecological or denominational or local church particulars that work against shepherding people from abuse need to be challenged, repaired, reformed or destroyed.

What should shepherds do? Focus on the flock and care and protection. Build safe and protected places for the sheep. Be prepared to act properly when something goes wrong. We need awareness and proper actions at every level of church life. In the local church, local association, state convention, entities, and denomination.

Know the right things to do and have policies and a culture that supports carrying them out. We cannot blame lack of money, busyness, gridlock, polity, process or time for a lack of action because the cost is just too great. When we hear an abuse survivor say that they no longer trust the church or christians to do the right thing we realize that sexual abuse is contrary

to the great commission - if we fail to address it, we fail in our efforts to obey the Lord Jesus to let the little children come to him.

Proper Readiness:

SCREEN - Adopt a careful vetting process for all those working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Screening should include applications, interviews, references, and background checks. Due diligence. Growth pressures = grow safely.

TRAIN - Provide initial and ongoing training for staff, volunteers, and church members that raises awareness and shares effective actions to help prevent incidents of abuse in the church. I know the subject is unpleasant - the mind can only endure so much - but what is the cost if we fail and someone is harmed?

PROTECT - Create and implement policies that protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults from grooming, and abuse. Policies that inhibit and confound the efforts of predators and groomers and their ways of preying and creating safe conditions for wicked behavior.

Shepherding responses:

REPORT - Have a written plan in place to communicate with both the church and appropriate government authorities in the event of an abuse allegation. Nail this or there will be trouble. Don't leave things up in the air. Plan and follow the plan. Don't base response on pressure from non-employed leaders, or who someone is or how much they give or how respected they are in the community. You have to report.

CARE - Identify and offer resources that will provide victims, survivors, and their families with options for ongoing care. Be ready to listen and to act when they speak up.

Defend from wolves who abuse and consume.

Shepherd the sheep gently.

Three defensive actions: Train. Screen. Protect.

Two shepherding responses: Report. Care.

Imitate me as I imitate Christ

More like a shepherd. More like Paul. More like Christ.

Avoid the failure of David. Avoid the fate of the judged shepherds.

Or More like a wolf?

Conclusion:

Close in prayer

For survivors of abuse

For pastors and leaders

For abusers

For the church