

Pastor's Pen: On Being a Wary Shepherd

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Being a shepherd isn't easy.

A shepherd is not always the owner of the sheep. He must take care of the sheep as the owner of the sheep desires. He must feed the sheep what and where the owner wants them to eat. He must remember he is answerable for the sheep entrusted to him.

A shepherd must be aware that predators want to devour his flock. They want to gorge themselves on every single ewe and lamb. In fact, the wolves would like to make a meal of the shepherd as well. A strong shepherd they will fear. A weak shepherd they will target.

A shepherd must be aware that the wolves would like him to become like them so that they may prey freely on the flock. They will welcome a shepherd who preys on the flock as well. They will encourage the shepherd to prey on his own flock without compunction. If the wolves cannot co-op the shepherd to prey on his own flock, then they will look to destroy him.

The shepherd must know the wolves are wise and wily. They will do their best to fool the sheep into a false sense of security. They will encourage them to wander far from the flock. The shepherd must train the sheep to listen to his voice and trust him over the wolves. The shepherd must be on guard against the wolves for his own good and good of the flock.

The shepherd must take the flock where the owner wants. He must trust that where the owner wants the flock to be is to the benefit of all. The shepherd must lead through verdant meadows and craggy mountain passes. He must keep sure of his own footing and be attentive to the footing of the flock, especially those who find the more difficult parts of the path too hard. With adept skill, a wary shepherd negotiates the most treacherous of trails and trains his flock to do the same.

The shepherd must be cautious of what the sheep consume. Pretty flowers can oftentimes be toxic poisons. He must steer his flock away from what is toxic lest they become fitting prey for the wolves. He must also avoid eating what is toxic, lest while in a diminished state the ever-present wolves snatch members of the flock or attack him.

The shepherd must also be aware of other shepherds. He must be able to tell the difference between a shepherd who is good at being a shepherd, a shepherd who bad at being a shepherd, and a wolf dressed as a shepherd. He must not allow the poor example of poor shepherds or the nefarious example of wolves in shepherd's clothing causes him to despair, compromise, or abandon his post.

Finally, the shepherd must know he represents to the owner of the flock. The flock will presume that the shepherd is doing what the owner wants. His diligence, care, protection, and skill point beyond himself and to the owner of the flock.

Bishops and priest are shepherds of a flock that belongs to Christ. He calls us to be these wary, skilled, protective, and wise men who will be good at shepherding. Parents are those shepherds, especially dads, of the flock entrusted to them in their spouse and children. Christ has the same expectation of parents in regards to their families as he does pastors and bishops of his churches.

When we shepherds fall short of our duties, we allow our flocks to be picked off. We invite the wolves in to prey of the flock. Or abandon the flock and our flocks suffer greatly. As the flock assigned us--- be it a bishop to a diocese, a pastor to his parish, or a parent to their spouse and children--- is not ours but God's first. We are held accountable to Christ for what we did with his flock. We must cultivate virtue in each of us to be those who are good at shepherding. We must cultivate them in the lambs as they will one day share in that role of that shepherding. One cannot prey on the lambs and train simultaneously the lambs to be good shepherds.

One of the primary reasons Camp Maccabee was founded was to train men to be good shepherds. To be a man who is good at shepherding, one must pursue virtue, holiness, and be a reflection of the Good Shepherd to that part of the flock of Christ entrusted to him. In an age where we see the fallout and grievous damage of bad shepherds, we don't abandon the flock, we raise up good shepherds will lead their flocks as Christ, the Good Shepherd, would have it done.

